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THE EVOLUTION OF TRUTH

ALSO BY HOWARD V KNOX

THE WILL TO BE FREE

THE PHILOSOPHY OF

WILLIAM JAMES

*(for reviews see
end of book)*

THE EVOLUTION
OF TRUTH

AND
OTHER ESSAYS

BY
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PREFACE

OF the eight essays comprised in this volume five have been published in *Mind*, two in the *Hibbert Journal*, and one, from which the collection more particularly derives its title, in the *Quarterly Review*. I have to thank the editors of these periodicals for permission to reproduce the essays in this form. The reproduction, as regards text and footnotes, it may be as well to say, is exact.

The article on *The Letters of William James* may be taken as supplementary, in respect of James's concern with religion, to my little book on *The Philosophy of William James*. The final essay was written in preparation for the book entitled *The Will to be Free*, and has been utilised by me in that work.—But I hope that, as a brief statement of the logical situation as between Voluntarism and Determinism, it may be found to retain some independent value.

The essays, here arranged in chronological sequence with dates attached, extend over a considerable number of years; but they show, I think, a real continuity of interest. They all illustrate the great philosophic conflict which appeared in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as the opposition of a rather vague and narrow Empiricism to a dogmatic and pretentious Rationalism; and which, tending in its development to an ever increasing emphasis on man's active nature rather than on a passive receptivity, now assumes the more vital form

of a systematic clash between Voluntarism and Intellectualism.

THIS development is to some extent exemplified in the essays themselves. The date of each essay becomes therefore a matter of some importance. But I believe that in the sustained polemic against 'timeless truth' none of the essays is wholly out of date. The length of time which the criticisms therein contained have remained unanswered suggests rather strongly that they really are unanswerable. For, after all, the only way of dealing with unanswerable objections is not even to *attempt* to answer them.

What I trust may be regarded as the evolution of truth within the covers of this volume takes the shape chiefly (i) of a growing perception of the *logical* futility of the 'Laws of Thought'; and (ii) a growing conviction that it is quite impracticable *first* to construct a Logic or Theory of Knowledge and *then* to apply it to the 'free-will problem.' For, in the end, the problem of knowledge and the problem of freedom are inseparable.

OXFORD, *July* 1929

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I

GREEN'S REFUTATION OF EMPIRICISM

[*Mind*, January 1900]

WHEN the critic raises any objection to the idealistic identification of thought and reality, he is apt to be met by some remark to the effect that his objection is due to his "taking the identity abstractly, as if it excluded difference." But if the identity is such as to include difference, then, surely, unless we know the nature of the difference, we do not know the nature of the identity. Until the difference is *defined*, the identity must remain abstract. Yet nowhere in the writings of 'absolute idealists' can we discover any nearer approach to an explicit definition of this difference in identity than is contained in the empty formula, that whereas objects exist only for thought, thought exists for itself ; or, as T. H. Green puts it in one place : ¹ " Undoubtedly there is something other than thought. Feeling is so ; the whole system of nature, on which feeling depends, is so ; its otherness from thought makes it what it is, but this is the same as saying that relation to thought makes it what it is, that but for thought it would not be." The formula is empty, because what we want to know is just this . In what way is

¹ *Works*, II p 181

nature different from thought, if it is constituted by thought, and if "but for thought it would not be"? Or, rather, the formula itself suggests a more urgent form of the same question, namely: How—if all relation is in and for thought—is relation *to* thought possible?

We must, then, try to discover for ourselves what it is that the idealist *means* when he proclaims the identity of thought and reality. With this end in view, I propose to examine the first two chapters of the *Prolegomena to Ethics* · for if, as Green says, "No one is more emphatic than Locke in opposing what is real to what we 'make for ourselves,' the work of nature to the work of the mind," it is certain that no one is more emphatic than Green himself in repudiating any such opposition of thought to reality. The fact, moreover, that Green is greatly concerned to refute empiricism, would seem, by reason of the defining power of the negative, to mark his work as specially suitable for our present purpose.

I

Green's final conclusion concerning the relation of man, as intelligence, to nature, is contained in the following passage :—

"We are not, however, fully stating the seemingly paradoxical character of every-day perception, in merely saying that it is a determination of events in time by a principle that is not in time. That is a description equally applicable to fact, and to the perception of fact. . . . We contradict

ourselves, if we say that there was first a chaos and then came to be an order ; for the ' first ' and ' then ' imply already an order of time, which is only possible through an action not in time. As little, on the other hand, can we suppose that which we only know as a principle of unity in relation, to exist apart from a manifold which through it is related. But we may avoid considering this principle, or the subject of which the presence and action renders possible the relations of the world of becoming, as itself in becoming, or as the result of a process of becoming. It seems to be otherwise with our perceiving consciousness. The very consciousness, which holds together successive events as equally present, had itself apparently a history in time. It seems to vary from moment to moment. It apprehends processes of becoming in a manner which implies that past stages of the becoming are present to it as known facts ; yet is it not itself coming to be what it has not been ?

“ It will be found, we believe, that this apparent state of the case can only be explained by supposing that in the growth of our experience, in the process of our learning to know the world, an animal organism, which had its history in time, gradually becomes the vehicle of an eternally complete consciousness. What we call our mental history is not a history of this consciousness, which in itself can have no history, but a history of the process by which the animal organism becomes its vehicle. ‘ Our consciousness ’ may mean either of two things, either a function of the animal

organism, which is being made, gradually and with interruptions, a vehicle of the eternal consciousness; or that eternal consciousness itself, as making the animal organism its vehicle and subject to certain limitations in so doing, but retaining its essential characteristic as independent of time, as the determinant of becoming, which has not and does not itself become. The consciousness which varies from moment to moment, which is in succession, and of which each successive state depends on a series of 'external and internal' events, is consciousness in the former sense. It consists in what may properly be called phenomena; in successive modifications of the animal organism, which would not, it is true, be what they are if they were not media for the realisation of an eternal consciousness, but which are not this consciousness. On the other hand, it is this latter consciousness, as so far realised in or communicated to us through modification of the animal organism, that constitutes our knowledge, with the relations, characteristic of knowledge, into which time does not enter, which are not in becoming but are once for all what they are. It is this again that enables us, by incorporation of any sensation to which attention is given into a system of known facts, to extend that system, and by means of fresh perceptions to arrive at further knowledge " ¹

No sooner, however, has Green put forward this explanation of the "apparent state of the case," than he is driven to acknowledge the purely

¹ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, §§ 66-67

formal character of the explanation—to acknowledge, that is, that the explanation does not fulfil the function of explaining —

“ For convenience’ sake,” he continues, “ we state this doctrine, to begin with, in a bald dogmatic way, though well aware how unwarrantable or unmeaning, until explained and justified, it is likely to appear. Does it not, the reader may ask, involve the impossible supposition that there is a double consciousness in man ? No, we reply, not that there is a double consciousness, but that the one indivisible reality of our consciousness *cannot be comprehended in a single conception*. In seeking to understand its reality we have to look at it from two different points of view ; and the different conceptions that we form of it, as looked at from these different points, *do not admit of being united*, any more than do our impressions of opposite sides of the same shield ; and as we apply the same term ‘ consciousness ’ to it, from whichever point of view we contemplate it, the ambiguity noticed necessarily attends that term ” ¹

The metaphor of the shield is unfortunate in the mouth of a philosopher who always insists, and rightly insists, that, in order to the possibility of knowledge, successive impressions must be held together in a single conception. But the general meaning of the passage seems sufficiently clear.² What Green here asserts is nothing less than this :

¹ *Op cit* § 68 (The italics are mine)

² If, that is, we do not too strictly interpret the previous assertion, that “ consciousness in the former sense ” “ consists in . . . successive modifications of the animal organism ” For that, as it stands, is ‘ crass materialism ’

that the two 'moments' of (a) thought as containing time, or thought as knowledge, and (b) thought as contained in time, or thought as psychical occurrence, do not admit of a genuine synthesis. Thus his effort to overcome the dualism of thought and reality eventuates, on his own showing, in an irremediable dualism of two aspects of thought. Nor will this outcome of idealism seem at all strange, if we recognise it as simply another expression for that absolute distinction between succession of consciousness and consciousness of succession which is the mainstay of the 'absolute idealist'

And, taking the idealistic conclusion on its own merits, it is difficult to see in it any improvement on the crudest form of empiricism. For consider : while in the one aspect thought is active and 'constitutive' and autocratic, in the other it is passively receptive of a miraculous revelation. We are left quite in the dark as to how it is ever possible for our purely passive consciousness to distinguish the objective 'communication' from mere subjective fancy ; seeing that so soon as it starts in to make distinctions on its own account it must cease to be purely passive. And the darkness deepens into a darkness that can be felt, when we hear that, " the one indivisible reality of our consciousness " notwithstanding, the object as ' communicated ' to us is never the object as it exists for the eternal consciousness :—

" Undoubtedly that which any event seems to us to be may be—nay always is—more or less different from what it really is. The relations by

which we judge it to be determined are not, or at any rate fall short of, those by which it is really determined " ¹

And again "It is true indeed . . . that the principle which enables us to know that there is a world, and to set about learning its nature, is identical with that which is the condition of there being a world ; but it is not therefore to be imagined that all the distinction and relations, which we present to ourselves—and necessarily present to ourselves—in the process of learning to know, have *counterparts in the real world*. Our presentation of them, as a part of our mental history, is a fact definitely related and conditioned in the reality of the world ; but the distinctions presented may exist *only for us*, in whom the intellectual principle realises itself under special conditions, not in the world *as it is in itself* or for a perfect intelligence." ²

II

Whatever may be the value of the conclusion which Green finally reaches, the one conspicuous thing about it is the sharp line therein drawn between the eternal object of thought and the temporally conditioned 'states of consciousness' in which that object is progressively revealed to us. In view of this, the least we can ask of Green is that he should make it perfectly clear that his argument as to the ideality of nature is concerned

¹ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, § 23

² *Op cit* § 43 (The italics are mine)

with nature *as such* ; and not in any way with the content of consciousness under that aspect in which it falls within the special province of the psychologist. And Green admits the justice of this demand.¹

But even without laying any special stress on that admission one might be apt to suppose that the ambiguity which, on his own theory, " necessarily attends " such terms as " consciousness," must needs entail a corresponding discrimination in the application thereof. When, however, we come to examine Green's argument, we find that he is too intent on getting rid of " the antithesis between the real and the work of the mind " to pay particular heed to the sense in which he uses the words

Hence it comes to pass that, to pave the way (as he expressly states) for the inquiry whether the real is the work of the mind,² Green asserts that " the work of the mind is real "—on the ground that even a mistaken belief " has its own reality. It has its history, its place in the development of a man's mind, its causes and effects ; and, as so determined, it is as real as anything else." ³

¹ " If thought and reality are to be identified, if the statement that God is thought is to be more than a presumptuous paradox, thought must be other than the discursive activity exhibited in our inferences and analyses, other than a particular mode of consciousness which excludes from itself feeling and will. As a follower of Hegel he (Dr Caird) must and does hold that the objective world, in its actual totality, is thought, and that the processes of our intelligence are but reflexions of that real thought under the conditions of a limited animal nature. But he does not sustain himself at this point of view. It may be that no one can, but till it is done our idealism, though we may wish it to be ' absolute,' remains merely ' subjective ' " (*Works*, in pp 142-43)

² *Prolegomena to Ethics*, § 24

³ *Op cit* § 22.

In this passage the reality of thought is explicitly made to rest on the fact that thought is in time. Surely then, if all reality is thought, *in the same sense as that in which thought is here said to be real*, reality must at best consist in successive states of consciousness? And if it is not in this sense, but in a sense absolutely different from this, that the real is to be identified with the work of the mind, then the fact that thought is really in time only escapes being utterly irrelevant, by being, to say the least of it, peculiarly embarrassing.

But, after all, we only penetrate to the true inwardness of the argument, when we observe that the reality here claimed for thought is avowedly shared by mistaken beliefs. The mere fact, then, of a thought being real in this sense is no guarantee against its being entirely false. And the reduction of all reality to thought, *as thus understood*, is precisely what constitutes dogmatic scepticism, or rather nihilism.

And the argument does not even escape verbal self-contradiction. For thought is said to be "as real *as anything else*"; and this necessarily implies that there is something else real besides thought. Which precludes *ab initio* the reduction of all reality to thought in the sense in which thought is here spoken of.

The fact of the matter is, that so to take advantage of the twofold nature of thought, whereby thought has temporal existence as well as meaning, as to obliterate, along with the distinction between reality and thought, the distinction between reality and illusion—a consummation

which Green, in the passage under discussion, is avowedly ¹ striving to effect—to do this is to deny the distinction between truth and error. Which, again, is to assert that one assertion is as good as another—and (so far as this particular assertion is concerned) a good deal better too. Surely it is a significant thing that on the threshold of the temple of idealism assertion should be solemnly required to divest itself of all meaning.

The confusion we have noticed is too hopeless to be really made any worse by the fact that Green, after rejecting as illusory the distinction between illusion and reality, incontinently 'passes' (the expression is his) to an inquiry into the nature of this distinction under the form of the question, "How do we decide whether any particular event or object is really what it seems to be, or whether our belief about it is true?"² And indeed I think a comparative study of the subjoined passages—which are not chance utterances, but mark successive stages of the argument in the *Prolegomena*—is calculated to discourage any attempt to 'comprehend in a single conception' Green's kaleidoscopic views as to the significance of the distinction between illusion and reality. (The italics are mine throughout.)

(a) "The terms 'real' and 'objective,' then, have no meaning except for a consciousness which presents its experiences to itself as determined by

¹ "The very question, What is the real?—which we seem to answer by help of this opposition [between the real and the work of the mind]—is a misleading one, so far as it implies that there is something else from which the real can be distinguished" (*ibid*)

² *Op cit* § 24, second paragraph.

relations, and at the same time conceives a single and unalterable order of relations determining them, with which its *temporary* presentation, as each experience *occurs*, of the relations determining it may be contrasted. For *such* a consciousness, *perpetually altering its views* of the relations determining any experience under the necessity of combining them in one system with other recognised relations, and for such a consciousness *only*, there is significance in the judgment that any experience seems to be so and so, *i.e.* to be related in a certain way, but really is otherwise related." ¹

(b) "From the above considerations thus much at any rate would seem to follow: that a form of consciousness, *which we cannot explain as of natural origin*," *i.e.* which is not in time, "is necessary to our conceiving an order of nature, an objective world of fact from which illusion may be distinguished." ²

(c) "Let us consider now how we stand. We have rejected the question, What is or constitutes the real? as intrinsically unmeaning, *because it could only be answered by a distinction which would imply that there was something unreal*." ³

(d) "There are difficulties enough, no doubt, in the way of accepting such a form of 'idealism,' but they need not be aggravated by misunderstanding. *It is simply misunderstood if it is taken to imply . . . the obliteration of the distinction between illusion and reality*" ⁴

¹ *Op cit* § 13 ² *Op cit* § 19 ³ *Op cit* § 26 ⁴ *Op cit* § 37.

III

In § 15 of the *Prolegomena*, after pointing out that "So far we have only reached the conclusion that a conception, to which understanding is related as faculty to function, is the condition of our ability to distinguish a real from the unreal, matter of fact from illusion"; Green continues:—

"It will be said perhaps that so much pains needs not have been spent on establishing a proposition which in effect merely tells us that without a conception of an order of nature we could not conceive an order of nature. Is not this, it may be asked, either an identical proposition or untrue—an identical proposition, if understood strictly as thus put; untrue, if taken to mean that the conception of an order of nature does not admit of being generated out of materials other than itself? Now it is just the difficulties in the way of explaining the origin of the conception in question out of anything else than judgments which presuppose it, that we wish to exhibit. They are the difficulties which beset any theory that would treat the knowledge of nature as itself the result of natural processes."

In the exposition of the said 'difficulties' lies the sum and substance of Green's criticism of empiricism; and here, so it seems, we are to gain the desired assurance that his proof of the ideality of nature is something more than the "identical proposition" that "without a conception of an order of nature we could not conceive an order of

nature." The exposition in question purports to show that "a consciousness of events as a related series . . . has not any element of identity with, and therefore cannot properly be said to be developed out of, a mere series of related events, of successive modifications of body or soul. . . . No one and no number of a series of related events can be the consciousness of the series as related " ¹

• Green himself subsequently interprets this doctrine to mean that "no knowledge, nor any mental act involved in knowledge, can properly be called a 'phenomenon of consciousness.' It may be *of* phenomena ; if the knowledge is of events, it is so." ² The head and front, therefore, of the empiricist's offending is that he subjects thought to historical treatment

"The attainment of the knowledge, again," Green generously allows, "as an occurrence in the individual's history, a transition from one state of consciousness to another, may properly be called a phenomenon ; but not so the consciousness itself of relations or related facts—not so the relations and related facts present to consciousness—in which the knowledge consists." ³ The "transition from one state of consciousness to another," which "may properly be called a phenomenon," presumably falls within the province of the psychologist ; while "the consciousness itself," "in which the knowledge consists," must—since no "mental act involved in knowledge can properly be called a phenomenon of consciousness"—fall wholly outside that province. Thus the

¹ *Op. cit.* § 16

² *Op. cit.* § 57

³ *Ibid.*

psychologist has left on his hands a series of transitions from nothing to nothing—a veritable *chimæra bombinans in vacuo*. In other words, Green quietly eviscerates the individual consciousness, as such, of its content; and in this way, while outwardly admitting that thought has in some sense a development in time, elusively contrives to repudiate any concrete application of that principle. Why it should be any less criminal to make psychology impossible than to make knowledge of nature impossible, is a question which does not seem to interest him in the least.

But to appreciate the argument in all the fulness of its futility, we must look at it in the light of Green's final conclusion. It is claimed that there is an absolute difference between any "series of related events" and "the consciousness of the series as related." It is claimed, in other words, that there is an *absolute difference between thought and its object*—when the object is a series of events. Now, if this refers to the eternal consciousness, what becomes of such statements as the following?—"Even if relations of any kind could be independent of consciousness, certainly those that form the content of knowledge are not so. As known they exist only for consciousness; and, if in themselves they were external to it, we shall try in vain to conceive any process by which they could find their way from without to within it."¹ Are we then to understand that consciousness as here spoken of is consciousness *sub specie temporis*—the consciousness which Green, half a dozen

¹ *Op cit* § 69.

pages farther on, assures us is "as real as anything else," and which therefore is different from the object it refers to? But this interpretation is precluded by the simple fact, that the argument under consideration, as has been already shown, amounts to an assertion that thought is not in time at all. We are driven therefore to the conclusion, that consciousness as here spoken of is not consciousness in either of the two divergent senses of the term recognised by Green—or, indeed, in any sense recognisable by mortal man.

Thus Green's refutation of empiricism is found to be, on the face of it, a denial that there can be any such thing as psychology at all; while on examination it "turns out to be a concatenation of words to which no possible connexion of ideas corresponds." And it is perhaps not unworthy of remark, that in any case the whole argument is in flat contradiction with the characterisation of empiricism as a *ὑστερον πρότερον*:¹ for so to characterise empiricism is to assert that nature, far from having no element of identity with thought, is itself a thought-product.

Green first maintains, ostensibly in harmony with the teaching of Kant, that "the understanding makes nature" (§§ 11-14). In answer to the objection that the proof given only establishes that "without a conception of an order of nature we could not conceive an order of nature," he next contends that knowledge of nature cannot be a "result of natural processes"—on the ground

¹ *Op cit* § 9 Cf also § 35, where the above contradiction comes out with special clearness

that there is no "element of identity" between nature and knowledge (§§ 15-18). On the strength of these considerations, and fortified by the insight that thought is "as real as anything else" (§§ 21-23), he proceeds to argue (§§ 26-37) that, succession being a relation, successive events are not successive;¹ and that not only our knowledge of nature, but nature itself, as "the system of related appearances," is "impossible apart from the action of an intelligence."² Green himself avers³ that this does *not* mean either that nature and knowledge are to be 'identified,' or that nature is a 'result' of intelligence; but it assuredly can mean nothing *else*. Besides, his original undertaking was to equate the 'real' with 'the work of the mind',⁴ and it is certainly in this sense that his results are applied in the sequel.⁵ In short, Green argues that *because* thought (being eternal) has no element of identity with nature, while at the same time (in virtue of having a history) it is as real as anything else; *therefore* the truth of Kant's dictum is, that nature in its totality is an eternal thought and empiricism is a *ὑστερον πρότερον*. He thus dexterously contrives to make his premisses not only mutually destructive, but also severally subversive of his conclusion. And if the premisses, when separately analysed, are found to be of more than dubious import, the conclusion taken by itself scarcely even pretends to have a meaning.

¹ "The objects between which a relation subsists, even a relation of succession, are, just so far as related, not successive" (*op cit* § 31)

² *Op cit* § 36

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Cf *op cit* §§ 19 and 24

⁵ Cf *op cit* § 42

Just by way of rounding off the above demonstration of the ideality of nature, Green endeavours, in §§ 42-51, to show that the distinction between the 'form' and 'matter' of experience—the distinction with which he has been working all along—is one of those which have no "counterparts in the real world", which "exist only for us, . . . not in the world as it is in itself or for a perfect intelligence" ¹. That is to say, in order to remove what he takes to be the one remaining obstacle to a complete identification of the real with the work of the mind, he rejects the distinction which forms the starting point of his entire argument, on the ground that it is the work of the mind as opposed to the real.

IV

The peculiar tangle, to which we have drawn attention in the preceding part, is to some extent explicable by the fact that the proof brought forward by Green, with wearisome reiteration, to establish the non-temporal character of thought, is made up of a twofold *ignoratio elenchi*. And it may parenthetically be remarked, that this proof, inasmuch as it makes no pretence of discriminating between true thought and false, places error on the same footing of eternity as truth.

The proof in question partly consists in maintaining (quite rightly) that the parts of the judgment are not successive: "There may be a change into a state of consciousness of change, and

¹*Op cit* § 43

a change out of it, on the part of this man or that ; but within the consciousness itself there can be no change, because no relation of before and after, of here and there, between its constituent members—between the presentation, for instance, of point A and that of point B in the process which forms the object of the consciousness ”¹ One might as pertinently argue that because H_2O is not first H_2 and then O, that therefore H_2O cannot be in time. The argument, in fact, will not hold water.

This confusion, now, between eternity and *indivisibility of the judgment* serves to eke out a similar, though more subtle, confusion between eternity and *continuity of consciousness*.

Green lays it down, in the most unqualified manner, that “ a consciousness of certain events cannot be anything that . . . succeeds them. It must be equally present to all the events of which it is the consciousness.”² The assertion herein contained, if deprived of the support of the first-mentioned fallacy, has absolutely no other justification than is afforded by the contention that “ in order that successive feelings may be related objects of experience, even objects related in the way of succession, there must be in consciousness an agent which distinguishes itself from the feelings, uniting them in their severalty, making them equally present in their succession.”³ Which contention is, to say the least of it, entirely beside

¹ *Op cit* § 18.

² *Op cit* § 16

³ *Op cit* § 32 Cf *Works*, II p 170 “ No doubt an act of consciousness is an event in the individual's history but it would not be a thought of time but for its determination by a subject which holds past and present together, which is no more *now* than it was *then* or will be *to-morrow*, and this is not in time ”

the mark. For, since the parts of the judgment-as-such, being admittedly in no way external to one another, do not require any 'holding together'; it follows that the only function the 'ego' has to fulfil is that of ensuring the continuity of consciousness. And consciousness, regarded as continuous, is consciousness *sub specie temporis*. In other words, Green bases the metaphysical necessity of an eternal 'agent' on the fact that thought has a growth in time; and then boldly invests thought itself with the non-temporal character of that 'agent'

The judgment—which is not an extended portion of the stream of consciousness, but the crest of an onward-moving wave—through all modifications of its content *cognitively* retains, in a measure, those past phases of consciousness which, as past, *are existentially* external to it in point of time. The principle of the 'ego,' or 'the synthetic unity of apperception,' is not so much an explanation as a recognition of this fundamental characteristic of *our* consciousness. And it is further implied in this principle, that the actual content of the judgment—though embracing a reference to the future—is relative to the stage of conscious experience so far attained. We can only learn, in fact, from past experience; and consequently have to wait on future experience for the means of improving our knowledge alike of the future and of the past. Thus, whatever way we look at it, the significance of the synthetic unity of apperception is absolutely bound up with the temporal aspect of thought: which aspect, however, in virtue of this principle.

can no longer be viewed as exclusive of the 'moment' of thought as knowledge. What possible meaning, indeed, is there in the distinction between past (or future) events, on the one hand, and present events on the other, except in so far as thought, distinguishing itself from the former, identifies itself, *in respect of its place in time*, with the latter ?

If only as a striking example of the irony of the Idea, it will be instructive to retrospectively consider the havoc wrought by this substitution of eternity of thought for the mutually implicated indivisibility of the judgment and continuity of consciousness. The said substitution finds expression, in the first instance, in an absolute distinction between succession of consciousness and consciousness of succession ; which—since the latter is identified with the eternal consciousness—is directly equivalent to *an absolute distinction between consciousness sub specie temporis and consciousness sub specie æternitatis*. And this, as we have seen, involves *the extrusion from consciousness sub specie temporis of the content of consciousness*. Further · the absolute distinction between succession of consciousness and consciousness of succession is avowedly based on the fact that the former *is* a succession ; and this argument is equally applicable to the time-process of nature as a whole. Nor does Green, in his eagerness to discredit empiricism, for a moment hesitate to avail himself of the principle as so extended. " Nature," he says, " with all that belongs to it, is a process of change change on a uniform

method, no doubt, but change still. All the relations under which we know it are relations in the way of change or by which change is determined. But neither can any process of change yield a consciousness of itself, which, in order to be a consciousness of the change, must be equally present to all stages of the change, nor can any consciousness of change, since the whole of it must be present at once, be itself a process of change.”¹ In other words, nature is not the eternal consciousness; has indeed (to use Green’s own expressions) no ‘community,’ no ‘element of identity’ therewith. Thus, *the object is definitely extruded from consciousness* sub specie æternitatis. And how we can be even so much as conscious of the object,² when the object is not in any sense in consciousness, is a question to which we shall in vain demand an answer from the ‘absolute idealist.’

The doctrine, then, that thought is not in time—the doctrine which purposed to rise on stepping-stones of dead empiricists to the lofty heights of a twofold identification of nature and of our thought with the divine consciousness—this doctrine has for its content a threefold absolute distinction between God, ourselves and nature. That is to say, it makes psychology impossible, it makes knowledge of nature impossible; and, since it leaves the word ‘consciousness’ without the vestige of a meaning, it makes philosophy impossible.

¹ *Op cit* § 18

² *Cf op cit* § 57. The passage referred to is quoted above, p. 13

II

MR. BRADLEY'S "ABSOLUTE CRITERION "

[*Mind*, April 1905]

THE intention of the present paper, on its critical side, is to traverse Mr. Bradley's contention ¹ that in the principle " Ultimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself " we have an " absolute criterion " for distinguishing appearance from reality. I hope to show that the principle of contradiction, so understood, is self-contradictory. I wish definitely to disclaim, at the outset, any sinister design of ruining the principle of contradiction, as such, by a *reductio ad absurdum*. Rather, my aim is to save the principle from its friends. The positive aim, that is, of the paper is to contribute towards a better interpretation of the principle than that which pervades the writings of those whose loudly proclaimed devotion thereto takes the shape of treating it as a Moloch, to be propitiated only by the sacrifice of every human interest. For if a *reductio ad absurdum* of the principle of contradiction is to be found anywhere, it is in the pages of *Appearance and Reality*; and it is my ambition to vindicate the principle from the charge of necessarily conducting to a complete *débâcle* of the intellect.

¹ *Appearance and Reality*, p 136

I

Before proceeding to a direct examination of Mr. Bradley's fundamental thesis, we will, however, take such an example of the results at which he arrives, as will justify this last assertion. A single example will, I think, be more than enough.

In Chapter II., entitled "Substantive and Adjective," Mr. Bradley maintains that the relation between a thing and its qualities is unintelligible. The reason he gives is that "If you predicate what is different, you ascribe to the subject what it is *not*; and if you predicate what is *not* different, you say nothing at all."¹ It does not require a writer of Mr. Bradley's ingenuity to prove that, once this position is admitted, we cannot escape from this "old dilemma" by substituting one kind of predicate for another. The objection is, of course, as he maintains, equally applicable to every predication whatsoever. Mr. Bradley's position, then, is that the distinction of substantive and adjective, as he calls it, is untenable *because* 'S is P' is fundamentally self-contradictory. At the same time he admits that 'S is S' does not represent a judgment at all. Thus, in Mr. Bradley's view, every real judgment, irrespective of the actual nature of its content, constitutes a violation of the principle of contradiction.

After further developing this view in the succeeding chapter, Mr. Bradley somewhat naively remarks that "The reader who has followed and

~ ¹*Ibid.* p. 20.

has grasped the principle of this chapter, will have little need to spend his time upon those which succeed it. He will have seen that our experience, where relational, is not true ; and he will have condemned, almost without a hearing, the great mass of phenomena " ¹ It would indeed be waste of time—if time were real—further to follow Mr. Bradley in his devastating progress through " the great mass of phenomena " If everything that can be said about anything is fundamentally unintelligible, it is transparently clear that we can never open our mouth without logically stultifying ourselves Unfortunately, Mr Bradley's reason for " condemning the great mass of phenomena " applies equally to everything he himself says about either appearance or reality. Nay, more If in deference to the principle of contradiction every real judgment is to be " condemned," then *either* the principle of contradiction itself is not really a judgment, *or* we shall best execute its behests by consigning it also to perdition. Or we may put it thus If in telling us that " Ultimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself," Mr Bradley is, as he claims, supplying us with " positive news about absolute reality," ² then for that very reason, according to his own principles, he is ascribing to reality " what it is *not*." ³

But let us envisage Mr. Bradley's contention from a slightly different point of view, in the hope that patience and sympathy may haply even yet win a way to some hidden depth of meaning. Mr. Bradley asserts that ' S is P ' is a self-contradiction

¹ *Appearance and Reality*, p 34 ² *Ibid* p 140 ³ *Ibid* p 20

diction. Quite obviously, this assertion itself, in order to be true, must be self-contradictory, so that, on the supposition that the assertion has a meaning, self-contradiction will here be a condition of truth, and not of falsity. Further, to admit that a tautology is not a judgment, is to admit that *only* an assertion of the type 'S is P' can have meaning. So that a contradiction of this kind is in fact the necessary condition of meaning in all propositions. The natural conclusion to draw would seem to be that *this kind* of self-contradiction—if we still insist on calling it self-contradiction—is not a defect, but a merit, in any proposition. And surely it should not be necessary to point out that the *condemnation* of any particular assertion as self-contradictory involves a distinction between assertions that are subject to the condemnation and those that are not? To break down the distinction—to represent self-contradiction in the expression of belief as wholly unavoidable—is to represent the demand for consistency of statement as something profoundly irrational. We find, however, that Mr. Bradley prefers not to admit any distinction between harmful and beneficial self-contradiction. Such a distinction he apparently regards as a mere practical makeshift, which theory cannot tolerate.¹ He prefers to adopt the course—which, whatever we may think of it, certainly cannot be accused of

¹ "The conclusion to which I am brought is that a relational way of thought—any one that moves by the machinery of terms and relations—must give appearance, and not truth. It is a makeshift, a device, a mere practical compromise, most necessary, but in the end most indefensible" (*Appearance and Reality*, p. 33)

being a practical makeshift—of cutting off the branch on which he sits. That is, he not only asserts that 'S is P' is a self-contradiction, but he also insists on so interpreting self-contradiction that this assertion, in order to be true, must at the same time be absolutely false. It is to be hoped that our failure to accept the principle of contradiction when so applied, will not be taken as evincing any disrespect for the principle in the abstract.

We may, however, I think, admit that if Mr. Bradley's view is sound, absolute idealism does indeed represent the last word of philosophy; for henceforth the only possible philosophy will be a philosophy without words, as without deeds. Mr. Bradley has, in fact, shown that a consistent absolute idealism must be speechless. But this consummation, however admirable in theory, is in practice marred by the fact that the absolute idealist is not consistent.

II

We have seen the result of identifying (1) the conception of self-contradiction as an absolute criterion for the detection of error, with (2) the conception of self-contradiction as an absolutely indispensable ingredient of all significant assertion. We may now go on to examine the claims of conception (1), judging it as far as possible on its own merits.

Before reaching that part of his book which ostensibly deals with "Reality," Mr. Bradley does

not put forward any definite statement of the principle on the validity of which, as he subsequently says (pp 136-37), his whole argument rests. We shall not be doing him any injustice therefore, if, in the first instance, we regard his constant appeal in Part I ("Appearance") as made to the principle in the form "A cannot be both B and not-B"

Now in any alleged instance of self-contradiction in the 'appearance' A, the contradiction must be either (1) merely apparent or (2) real. If (1), there is no room for the application of the principle of contradiction. If A's internal conflict is only apparent and not real, there is no ground for condemning A itself as appearance. To apply the principle, therefore, we must assume (2).

To avoid needless complications, we may abstain from pressing the objection that the mere possibility of mistaking an apparent for a real contradiction is an insuperable obstacle to regarding the principle as an 'absolute criterion.' Even an 'absolute truth' can only be an absolute *criterion*, on condition of never actually leading us into error; so that any possibility of faulty application is incompatible with the claim of the criterion to be absolute¹. Mr. Bradley, however, is untroubled by such doubts. He has no hesitation in assuming, in every case, that the contra-

¹ There is the less need for dwelling on this point, as it has been well worked out already by Mr Alfred Sidgwick in his article on "Applied Axioms" in *Mind* (N S), No 53. I may, however, take this opportunity of pointing out that the whole of the present paper is in keeping with Mr Sidgwick's contention, that *no* truth can be at once undeniable and applicable.

diction is real and not apparent. And from his own point of view he is right. For has he not demonstrated in Chapters II. and III. that "a relational way of thought" is *necessarily* self-contradictory? Thenceforth for him there is no need to discriminate between real and apparent inconsistency: for him one proposition must be as unintelligible as another.

But to resume. In order to condemn the 'appearance' A as self-contradictory, we must take it as proved that, rightly viewed, it *really is* both B and not-B; since otherwise the contradiction is apparent and not real. On the other hand, the only reason that is adduced for denying the reality of A under these circumstances is that, according to the principle of contradiction, it *cannot be* both B and not-B. The reality of A is denied on the ground that it cannot be that which, by the very terms of the impeachment, it really is. Thus every attempt to utilise our principle as a criterion involves a denial of its claim to be true absolutely and without qualification. Unless something can be, and is, self-contradictory, there is nothing for us to condemn on the score of self-contradiction. This, then, is the position to which we are reduced: If self-contradiction is possible, the principle is false; and if self-contradiction is impossible, the principle has no possible application. That is to say, the claim of our 'criterion' to be at once absolute and applicable is self-destructive.

"But," it will be objected, "all that you have really proved is that in the statement 'A cannot

be both B and not-B ' A is not to be taken unconditionally The principle should run ' A, if real, cannot be both B and not-B ' ; which is equivalent to saying that ' Only appearance can be self-contradictory ' And this accords with Mr. Bradley's own statement of the principle, namely, ' Ultimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself ; here is an absolute criterion.' "

Well, it is something to have gained the admission that the principle of contradiction requires qualification before it can be made applicable. For now there may be greater readiness to regard it as open to question whether the proposed qualification is the one really required. To this question, then, we will now address ourselves. I think it will be found that, in point of fact, the proposed limitation is a step entirely in the wrong direction.

Restricting ourselves, in the first instance, to Mr. Bradley's plane of thought, we straightway encounter the difficulty that if any alleged contradiction in the ' appearance ' A is real, then A, as owning that contradiction, must itself partake of reality. It seems strange, does it not, to deny A's reality precisely by reason of some real feature which it is supposed to present ? To put the difficulty in a more general way. If reality cannot be self-contradictory, then all self-contradiction must be merely apparent ; and conversely, if self-contradiction is real, then the real is so far self-contradictory. We are therefore confronted by the following dilemma: If the contradiction in A is merely apparent, then our ' absolute

criterion ' is not applicable , and if the contradiction is real, than A is so far, not mere appearance, but reality Here again, then, we see that the attempt to apply our ' absolute criterion ' is self-destructive

And the situation becomes, if possible, still worse when we inquire into the *grounds* of this amazing criterion. On this point there can be no possibility of mistake as to Mr. Bradley's meaning. He says : " For consider · you can scarcely propose to be quite passive when presented with statements about reality You can hardly take the position of admitting any and every nonsense to be truth, truth absolute and entire, at least so far as you know For, if you think at all so as to discriminate between truth and falsehood, you will find that you cannot accept open self-contradiction . . . It [*i e* the ' absolute criterion '] is proved absolute by the fact that, either in endeavouring to deny it, or even in attempting to doubt it, we tacitly assume its validity."¹ That is to say, reality cannot be self-contradictory, *because* a self-contradiction is not a possible object of belief. Contradiction is impossible in reality because it is impossible in thought. In other words, the final rendering of the principle of contradiction is " A cannot be *conceived* as both B and not-B."

But this rendering is only verbally different from our original principle, as is evident from the fact that our original dilemma reappears in the following shape If self-contradictory belief is

¹ *Op cit* pp 136-137

possible, the principle is false ; and if self-contradictory belief is impossible, the principle has no possible application. And, obviously, so far as it is true that A cannot be *conceived* as both B and not-B, so far is it true, and true without any sort of qualification, that A cannot *be* both B and not-B.

Mr. Bradley's argument, therefore, defeats itself. Clearly, for the special purpose of the 'absolute criterion' it is needful to show, not so much that reality cannot, as that appearance *can*—and, indeed, must—be self-contradictory. Or our difficulty may be more fully stated thus. Our readiness to accept as axiomatic the dictum, that "Ultimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself," entirely depends upon whether or not that dictum is taken as equivalent to the assertion that *only* 'ultimate' reality can escape self-contradiction. At the same time, without assuming that equivalence, the dictum obviously cannot pose as an absolute criterion for distinguishing appearance from reality. And it is precisely in respect of this crucial point that Mr. Bradley's argument appears so singularly defective : the impossibility of self-contradiction in the abstract is doubtless a valid reason for denying the possibility of self-contradiction in reality, but does not by itself seem a valid reason for assuming the possibility of self-contradiction in any concrete form whatever. Or can it be that Mr. Bradley holds *experience* to be a sufficient guarantee for the reality of self-contradiction—though not for that of anything else ? Is he prepared to

maintain that because self-contradiction is impossible in reality, therefore experience is powerless to establish the reality of that which appears to be self-contradictory ; but nevertheless suffices to establish the reality of the self-contradiction ? However that may be, what we are entitled to demand is a reasoned justification of the strange theory that the principle of contradiction *does not apply to appearance* ; and all that we get is the assurance that a self-contradiction must be absolutely unthinkable. In other words, Mr. Bradley's exclusion of appearance from the proper scope of the principle of contradiction is purely arbitrary. It stands, not for a qualification, but for a denial, of the principle of contradiction.¹

In the foregoing review of the relation between Mr. Bradley's criterion and the grounds actually adduced in its support, I have been content to lay stress on the arbitrary character of the transition from the impossibility of self-contradiction in reality to the necessity of self-contradiction in appearance. I am not concerned to deny that 'arbitrary' is a somewhat colourless epithet with which to describe so violent a transition as that from the affirmation to the negation of the principle of contradiction. I simply wish to emphasise

¹ We are therefore justified in saying that, under the most favourable interpretation, Mr. Bradley's theory of the Universe amounts simply to this. The principle of contradiction is unassailable on grounds of pure reason, *but*—this whole world in which we live and move and have our appearance forms one vast, rigid and unintelligible exception thereto. It is quite in accordance with the fitness of things that the author of such a scheme should profess abhorrence and contempt for every form of scepticism. And yet a rule, which, so far as our positive knowledge extends, consists entirely of exceptions, seems to afford a somewhat insecure basis on which to rest dogmatic statements about the nature of ultimate reality.

its sufficiency in regard to the pretensions of the 'absolute criterion.' For unless these two statements, "Ultimate reality is such that it does not contradict itself," and "Appearance is essentially self-contradictory"—unless these can be shown to set forth diverse aspects of one and the same principle, the 'criterion' abruptly fades into the inane. It seems clear that nothing less heroic than the absorption of the principle of contradiction in some higher synthesis could possibly meet the requirements of the case. But even this consideration—though, to our human limitations, it might seem fairly decisive—when taken barely as it stands is no adequate measure of the futility of the 'absolute criterion' The resistless self-disruptive tendency of the 'absolute criterion' resides in the fact that, in basing the impossibility of self-contradiction in reality, as opposed to appearance, on the impossibility of self-contradiction in thought, *it thereby represents [false] appearance as antithetical at once to thought and to reality.*

Now, whether we assert or deny the ultimate identity of thought and reality, it remains true that *if* any being is wholly distinct from thought, then such distinctness constitutes an indefeasible title to reality. To 'identify' thought and reality is merely to treat the possibility in question as wholly meaningless. If, therefore, a given 'appearance' actually *is* independent of thought to the extent of refusing to be bound by the laws thereof, we cannot do otherwise than acquiesce in its masterful reality. That is to say, a self-

contradictory appearance, if such a thing were possible, would *ipso facto* be reality in the shape of the thing-in-itself and the fact that to be at once an appearance and a thing-in-itself is to be a contradiction, would but enhance its reality. Indeed, its title to reality would be twofold : firstly, on the ground that the contradiction itself is taken to be a real feature in the ' appearance ' ; and secondly, on the ground that *nothing but* reality could so triumphantly defy the laws of thought.

We see, then, that to oppose appearance to thought is to identify it with reality. And the complement of this, namely that to oppose appearance to reality is to identify it with thought, is perhaps even more obviously true. What possible account, indeed, can be given of false appearance, except that it is an appearance which has been wrongly interpreted ? And where there is interpretation, there thought has been at work. Contrariwise, an appearance, taken for what it is, is simply fact. As Mr Bradley himself is fain to admit, when arguing against the thing-in-itself, " What appears, for that sole reason, indubitably *is* ; and there is no possibility of conjuring its being away from it." ¹ Thus appearance can be contrasted with reality, only according as it is assimilated to thought. Whence it follows that if we deny anything of reality *on the ground that it is impossible to think it*, we must, *à fortiori*, deny it of appearance. We must, in fact, deny it of what may be called ' appearance *uberhaupt* ' ; *i.e.* of appearance in the widest sense, as comprising both

¹ *Op cit* p 132

false appearance on the one hand, and true appearance, or reality, on the other. In other words, a necessary law of thought is by its very nature incapable of serving as a criterion for distinguishing appearance from reality. The law must be operative in *all* thought, irrespective of the character of the thought as true or false: since, if it is not so operative, it forfeits its claim to be a genuine necessity of thought. The real meaning therefore of the dictum that " ultimate Reality is such that it does not contradict itself " turns out to be " Appearance, as such, cannot be self-contradictory." Or, rather, the only sense in which appearance can be self-contradictory, is that there can be such a thing as the appearance of self-contradiction without the reality of it.

III

But since appearance, as such, cannot be really self-contradictory, it follows that if the appearance A is found to combine the attributes B and C, then we are bound to regard this fact as a decisive proof that C cannot be truly described as not-B, in the sense contemplated by the principle of contradiction. As Mr. Schiller puts it, " Nothing which *exists*, in however despicable a sense, can really be contradictory. . . . If, therefore, it appears ' contradictory ' the fault is ours." ¹ To admit that A is truly appearance, is to deny that it can be really self-contradictory. It has, indeed, been already shown, as Mr. Schiller also suggests, ² that the only

¹ *Humanism*, p. 187

² *Ibid*

alternative would be to regard, not appearance as such, but reality, as essentially self-contradictory. If A has so much reality as is implied in the fact of its being an actual appearance, then its self-contradictory nature, by removing it from the realm of thought, must enthrone it in the kingdom of the thing-in-itself. On the other hand, if we *can* deal with A in thought to the extent implied by our thinking of it as an actual appearance, then A must be essentially amenable to the necessary conditions of thought.

The conclusion above set forth can be obscured only by assuming, with Mr. Bradley, that 'not-B' as (1) implying incompatibility with B—which is the sense required by the principle of contradiction—is necessarily identical with 'not-B' as (2) simply implying difference from B. And we have already seen to what result that assumption leads Mr Bradley himself. Having, in fact, once realised that 'S is P' cannot without self-contradiction be regarded as really self-contradictory, we have no longer any excuse for confusing the above two senses of 'not-B.' And once we have realised the ambiguity of that expression, and have recognised the sense it must bear for the purposes of the principle of contradiction, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving that the only way in which we can decide the question whether so-called 'not-B' is really incompatible in thought with B—whether, that is, an alleged contradiction is real—is *by applying the test of experience*. The only thing that can render "not-B" really incompatible in thought with B is—not

the fact that the former is *called* not-B—but **our** actual inability to regard them as common attributes of the given subject A. Instead of saying, therefore, that thought is to decide whether experience is self-contradictory, we must say that **only** experience can decide whether an alleged self-contradiction is really such or not. The more irresistible the proof that a so-called contradiction is really present in an actual experience (such as change), the more inevitable is the interpretation that the so-called contradictory elements thereof are *not really* contradictory. In other words, the apparent proof that such a contradiction is **real**, is really a proof that the contradiction is **only** apparent; and conversely, if the contradiction that seems to be disclosed is really a contradiction, that is a proof that the analysis has been incorrectly performed.

IV

The present paper will have fulfilled its object if it has succeeded in showing (1) generally, **that** there are difficulties in connexion with the intellectualist norm of non-contradiction, at least as serious as any involved in the pragmatist acceptance of the reality of change; and (2) specially, that Mr. Bradley's uncritical use of the principle of contradiction commits him to contradictions which, judged by any standard, seem real, and judged by his own standard are necessarily so.

As against those, therefore, who gravely raise the question, "Is motion possible?" I would as

gravely put the prior question, "Is self-contradiction possible?" And this question, I venture to think, is one which whosoever rejects the idea of change as self-contradictory will find peculiarly hard to answer satisfactorily. If he is not in a position to show that precisely such self-contradiction as he professes to find in change is theoretically possible, he, of all men, will of course not ask us to believe that it nevertheless is real. But if he *does* succeed in establishing the possibility of a genuinely self-contradictory notion, he will thereby have uprooted the principle that a self-contradiction, *qua* unthinkable, can have no place in reality. On the other hand, to maintain that the contradiction, the reality of which it is sought to establish, resides not in the notion but in the thing itself, would be to abandon altogether the position, that what is unthinkable cannot possibly be real. In short, to assume the possibility of self-contradiction in change—whether that contradiction is located in the notion or in the thing—is to deny the impossibility of self-contradiction in reality. Indeed, so far as the self-contradictory nature of 'A becomes B' is bound up with the self-contradictory nature of 'S is P,' so far is it bound up with the view that self-contradiction is something the *avoidance* of which is not possible—nor even desirable. The champions of consistency-at-any-price really must make up their minds as to whether self-contradiction is possible or impossible. That either alternative is equally fatal to the contention that change is unreal, is their misfortune, and not our fault.

But that, I admit, is an *argumentum ad hominem*. The real problem, as I understand it, is this : What is the real nature of self-contradiction ; and what is the nature of the condemnation to which it is truly subject ? And, further, What is the real relation between self-contradiction and error ? These questions admit, I believe, of an intelligible answer ; but not without our having recourse to those very categories which Mr. Bradley condemns as false on the ground of their being self-contradictory. It would be interesting to know if Mr. Bradley can furnish a solution of our problem, which shall be at the same time a justification of the method followed in *Appearance and Reality*.

III

PRAGMATISM : THE EVOLUTION OF TRUTH

[*Quarterly Review* (Centenary Number), April 1909]

WITH the appearance of Prof. James' *Pragmatism*, the interesting philosophical movement which, during the past ten years, has created an unparalleled disturbance in the circle of professional philosophers, may be said to make its first definite appeal to the cultivated public. It seems, therefore, not inappropriate to attempt, on the one hand, to give an estimate of its character and value, and, on the other, to set in a clear light the fundamental question which the controversy raises. For, as is usually the case among philosophers, the main point has been needlessly obscured by a multitude of side-issues ; and the catchwords of the combatants are confusing rather than illuminating. For example, the formulas in common use to express the pragmatic method are by no means self-explanatory. To say that truth depends upon consequences, that truth is practical, that all truths are useful, and that meaning depends on application and on purpose—all these statements seem paradoxical and are calculated to arrest attention, but hardly appear at first sight to concern the central problem of all thought. In

point of fact, however, what they are really intended to raise is the whole problem of 'meaning'. What, that is, is the difference between a real and a sham assertion—between an assertion that conveys a meaning and one that does not? As Mr. Alfred Sidgwick says (*Mind* (N.S.), 67, p. 368), "The straightforward question is whether the pragmatist contention about the need of a meaning, and the nature of a meaning, is sound or not."

When it is said that truth depends on application, what is meant is that a 'truth' which cannot be applied can have no meaning. When it is said that all truths are useful, what is meant is that to apply them is to use them; and that, consequently, whatever is possessed of meaning must be capable of use. When it is said that truth is practical, what is meant is that in the process of application the final term must always be application to some concrete situation; and hence any so-called theory that avowedly makes no conceivable difference in practice stands confessed as meaningless. To say that the truth of an assertion depends upon its consequences, is, again, only another way of saying that the penalty of claiming a one-sided independence of theory from practice is the impossibility of assigning any meaning to the so-called theory. Lastly, the contention that meaning depends on purpose sharply challenges the inveterate convention that logic, in its examination of thought, is bound to abstract from the personality of the thinker.

Hence the ironical humbleness of some defences

of the pragmatic principle is somewhat deceptive. When Pragmatism professes to be merely a method of testing truths and disclaims the ambitions of a metaphysic, it is fully conscious that a method which works may be far more valuable than a metaphysic which is pursued as an intellectual game ; and that a philosophy which has not yet made good its claim to a meaning can hardly make good its claim to absolute truth. Another very disconcerting feature of this line of criticism is the willingness of Pragmatism to be judged by its own standards. Pragmatism tests the truth of assertions by the success of their applications ; it will confess itself erroneous if any truth can be found to retain a meaning while evading this test. Contrast with this the rival doctrine which initially defines truth as coherence and finally discovers that this view of truth cannot itself be made coherent.

Before, however, we plunge into the whirlpool of philosophic controversy, the history of the subject brings up a point of nomenclature. Is ' Pragmatism ' the best name for the new teaching, or will it sound more attractive if denominated ' Humanism ' ? It is easy to understand Dr. Schiller's preference for the latter term.¹ ' Pragmatism ' sounds technical and learned and needs

¹ In adapting the word ' Humanism ' to the uses of philosophy, Dr Schiller has in reality merely regularised a usage which was already vaguely current in philosophical literature. The employment of the word for philosophical purposes has also since been sanctioned by an absolutist philosopher, Prof J S Mackenzie, in his *Lectures on Humanism*. But, as Dr Schiller has pointed out (*Mind* (N S), No 64, p 605), Prof Mackenzie deprives the term of any definite meaning by blurring its antithesis to absolutism.

much explanation, it is therefore unsuited for a philosophy which wishes to appeal to all men. As Dr Schiller formulates the distinction, Humanism is "the philosophic attitude which, without wasting thought upon attempts to construct experience *a priori*, is content to take human experience as the clue to the world of human experience, content to take Man on his own merits, just as he is to start with, without insisting that he must first be disemboweled of his interests and have his individuality evaporated and translated into technical jargon, before he can be deemed deserving of scientific notice. To remember that Man is the measure of all things, *i.e.* of his whole experience-world, and that if our standard measure be proved false all our measurements are vitiated; to remember that Man is the maker of the sciences which subserve his human purposes, to remember that an ultimate philosophy which analyses us away is thereby merely exhibiting its failure to achieve its purpose—that, and more that might be stated to the same effect, is the real root of Humanism, whence all its auxiliary doctrines spring." (*Humanism*, pp. xix, xx)

Pragmatism may then be conceived as merely "~~the application of Humanism to the theory of knowledge~~" (*ib.* p. xxi); or, more precisely, as "the thorough recognition that the purposive character of mental life generally must influence and pervade also our most remotely cognitive activities. In other words, it is a conscious application to the theory of life of the psychological facts of cognition as they appear to a teleo-

logical Voluntarism. In the light of such a teleological psychology the problems of logic and metaphysics must appear in a new light, and decisive weight must be given to the conceptions of Purpose and End. Or, again, it is a systematic protest against the practice of ignoring in our theories of Thought and Reality the purposiveness of all our actual thinking, and the relation of all our actual realities to the ends of our practical life. It is an assertion of the sway of human valuations over every region of our experience, and a denial that such valuation can validly be eliminated from the contemplation of any reality we know " (*Humanism*, p. 8)

' Humanism ' is thus at once the more inclusive and the more expressive term of the two , and Dr. Schiller makes the suggestion that the term ' Pragmatism ' should be restricted to a purely epistemological significance. The point at which Pragmatism emerges into full-blown Humanism is still perhaps not quite fixed, but there is probably nothing to be gained by attempting to draw a hard line between the two. If we are to preserve the distinction, it could best be turned to account by saying that, though Pragmatism insists on the purposive character of all thought, it does not proceed to emphasise with Humanism the *personal* character of all actual concrete thinking. This classification has the advantage of enabling us to describe Prof. Henri Poincaré as a Pragmatist, though not a Humanist.¹

¹ See his works *La Science et l'Hypothèse* (Paris Flammarion, 1902), and *La Valeur de la Science* (ib 1903)

Historically the term 'Pragmatism' was the first in the field. It was devised thirty years ago by Mr C S Peirce to designate certain views which he expounded in an article in the *Popular Science Monthly* for January 1878. His object in this paper was to propose a test for distinguishing between verbal and vital disputes. Disputants were invited to consider what practical difference would be made by the adoption of one ostensible answer rather than the other. Where no such difference was discernible, the so-called question was judged to be really meaningless; and, on the other hand, the nature of the difference, if any, was held to define the 'effective meaning' of the answer.

Twenty years later Prof. James, in his pamphlet *Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results*, called attention to this 'principle of Peirce,' and introduced the term 'Pragmatism' into philosophical literature. In this pamphlet we find the leading ideas of present-day Humanism. In particular, the conception of *meaning* as residing in the claim to practical efficacy seems almost of necessity to carry with it the conception of *truth* as consisting in the actual establishment of the claim.

Subsequently Prof. James thus described the career of the term he had introduced (*Pragmatism*, p. 47) :

"By that date (1898) the times seemed ripe for its reception. The word 'Pragmatism' spread, and at present it fairly spots the pages of the philosophical journals. On all hands we find the

'pragmatic movement' spoken of, sometimes with respect, sometimes with contumely, seldom with clear understanding. It is evident that the term applies itself conveniently to a number of tendencies that hitherto have lacked a collective name, and that it has 'come to stay.' "

In the year previous to the appearance of the above-mentioned pamphlet, Prof. James had published a collection of essays under the title of *The Will to Believe*, dedicated "To my Old Friend, Charles Sanders Peirce." That the general point of view which gives unity to this book is already typical of Humanism appears from the following striking passage :

"Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question I should call it that of *radical empiricism*,¹ in spite of the fact that such brief nicknames are nowhere more misleading than in philosophy. I say 'empiricism,' because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience ; and I say 'radical,' because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and, unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square " (p vii)

The Will to Believe was, unfortunately, read with too little reference to the psychological ground-

¹ More recently, in his preface to *Pragmatism*, Prof. James seems disposed to restrict the term 'radical empiricism' to his own humanistic metaphysic of pure experience

work prepared in Prof. James' great *Principles of Psychology* (1890), and contained no appeal to any explicitly logical principle. Taken thus barely, it seemed to many to be intended for religious application only, and to set up a claim for licence to believe at will, it was therefore widely denounced as intellectually demoralising. But much unjust and irrelevant criticism would have been spared if the critics had paid more heed to Prof. James' warning that these essays "should be taken as illustrations of the radically empiricist attitude rather than as argumentations for its validity. That admits meanwhile of being argued in as technical a shape as anyone can desire, and possibly I may be spared to do later a share of that work" (pp ix, x).

It is, no doubt, a matter for regret that, on its first appearance, the pragmatic principle should have been so closely linked with what is still its most contestable, though its most interesting application. This application was indeed calculated to draw attention to the importance and scope of the method, but whether it would yield the desired confirmation of religious postulates remained, after all, a matter on which there might be two opinions. All that Prof. James had actually contended for was that certain risks had to be taken on faith by both parties; but it was tempting to treat this doctrine merely as intended to revive the apologetics of Pascal's wager, and to glorify Faith by the sacrifice of Reason. His essential purpose was, however, to challenge the very conception of 'pure Reason' which created

the antithesis, and to mitigate their divergence by showing that Reason, no less than Faith, must be justified by works

At worst this was a mistake in controversial tactics. But these brilliant essays were deficient also in a more vital point. The need for the verification of the hypotheses deemed worthy of trial was not adequately emphasised even though it was not wholly overlooked

"Our great difference from the scholastic" (says Prof. James) "lies in the way we face. The strength of his system lies in the principles, the origin, the *terminus a quo* of his thought; for us the strength is in the outcome, the upshot, the *terminus ad quem*. Not where it comes from but what it leads to is to decide. It matters not to an empiricist from what quarter an hypothesis may come to him; he may have acquired it by fair means or by foul; passion may have whispered or accident suggested it; but if the total drift of thinking continues to confirm it, that is what he means by its being true."¹ (*The Will to Believe*, p. 17.)

But, on the whole, the author lays more stress on "the right of the individual to indulge his personal faith at his personal risk" (*ib.* p. xi) than on the fact that the reality of the risk measures also the reality of the belief, or, in other words, that the extent to which the will to believe is truly 'live' (pp. 2-4) depends on the danger that future experience may fail to confirm it.

¹ Cf. the last chapter ("Necessary Truths and the Effects of Experience") in Prof. James' *Principles of Psychology*, on the back-door way of acquiring 'necessary' truths

For to accept a risk is to believe that the wisdom of our choice will be justified by the event. Where the future shall 'decide,' there, and there only, is our 'option' a real risk

Truth, then, demands verification ; and verification means successful emergence from the ordeal of experience. " True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not " (*Pragmatism*, p 201). The logical novelty this implies is that initial certainty may be dispensed with in our reasonings, if they subsequently receive the support of continuous verification. In fact, it follows that an assertion which no conceivable experience can confute can have no conceivable meaning. The older logicians searched in vain for absolutely certain premisses from which to deduce their conclusions. What was to them *de jure* the essential condition of truth was what *de facto* no human truth could ever attain.

But, as has been already suggested, it was the human significance of this conception of truth rather than its logical importance that Prof. James had sought in these essays to put forward. His method, however, cried out for this application to logical theory. Dr Schiller instantly grasped that its logical was at least equal to its human importance.¹ He was doubtless prompted by his logical interest and his appreciation of the views put forth, strictly in the interests of logic itself, by Mr. Alfred Sidgwick² His most strik-

¹ V " Axioms as Postulates," in *Personal Idealism*. Cf especially p 91 and footnote

² Cf e.g. *Studies in Humanism*, pp 8, 9, 149
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ing achievement may thus be said to consist in having brought to a common focus Mr. Sidgwick's criticism of the current logics and the ethico-psychological views of Prof James. To call this brilliant synthesis Humanism seems singularly apt. For it is admittedly philosophy's task to unify. But unification, like charity, should surely begin at home, *i.e.* with man himself; and Humanism really restores to man that living unity of his experience which 'monistic' rationalism has destroyed by its exaltation and isolation of the theoretic faculty. On the other hand, the evident unfamiliarity of most idealists with Mr. Sidgwick's subtle analysis of the logical distinction between 'real' and 'formal' largely accounts both for the tenacity with which they cling to a purely formal conception of the 'real,' and for their apparent inability to grasp that it is on a charge of formalism and inapplicability, rather than of mere falsity, that their theory is arraigned.

Now this is to say that the most salient feature of the humanist philosophy consists, not of a new answer to the ancient demand for a criterion of truth, but of a radical re-shaping of the problem. The humanist critic summons the absolutist, in the first instance, not to make good the truth of his assertions, but to vindicate a meaning for his position. The fundamental charge to be brought against all absolutist philosophies is quite startling in its simplicity. They are charged with a fundamental confusion of two senses of truth which it is vitally necessary to distinguish. The first sense

is real, and distinguishes truth from error ; the second sense is formal, and includes truth with error in the common claim to truth which all assertions make. This latter, as Dr. Schiller says (*Studies in Humanism*, p 145), "being inherent in assertion as such," is "a formal and trivial thing . . . possessing little real interest for knowledge." Hence this formal truth is incapable of satisfying a demand for real truth. And, as a bald fact of philosophic history, not one of the many rationalist philosophies has relevance to the theory of real truth at all. This is not the place to trace this singular miscarriage of philosophic effort in its historical details. The future historian of philosophy will find therein abundant occupation.

It will probably be granted by most philosophers that the question "What is truth?" is of great importance and antiquity. Many also would agree that, as it is constantly raised, it presumably means something. It may further be suggested that what bestows meaning and importance on this question is the interest we have in discovering in what way truth is different from, and better than, error. For, in the first place, if truth and error are humanly indistinguishable, our inability to discern truth would be balanced by the impossibility of our ever being convicted of error, and yet, in real life, probably no human being is completely impervious to the 'lessons of experience.' In the second place, if one is not preferable to the other, it would make no difference which we got, and yet we not infrequently find a 'change of mind' expedient. If, however,

it be granted that to discriminate truth from error is the problem, does it not inevitably follow that the theory of truth and that of error are one and the same ? Is it not clear that a theory which fails to explain how mistakes are corrected has no claim to be regarded as a theory of correct belief ? To enquire into the nature of either truth or error is hopeless unless we can hope also to explain the other ; both raise the question of the nature of the distinction between them. Yet it is precisely this question as to the nature of the *distinction* between truth and error that rationalist philosophers, from Plato onwards, have either entirely neglected or egregiously failed to solve. Each in turn has been beguiled into taking truth in abstraction from error ; and not one has realised that his failure to leave room for error, as something different from truth, destroys the meaning of his theory of truth.

In this connexion Mr Joachim's extremely able and ingenuous essay on *The Nature of Truth* is an invaluable document. It shows how these shortcomings are at last beginning to trouble the absolutist conscience, though hardly as yet with such conviction as to foreshadow a genuine change of heart. To appreciate Mr. Joachim's difficulties it will be best to let him speak for himself. After giving a preliminary sketch of the theory he wishes to defend, and warning us that "systematic coherence," which is the truth, "must not be confused with the 'consistency' of formal logic," he continues -

"Truth, we said, was the systematic coherence

which characterised a significant whole. And we proceeded to identify a significant whole with 'an organised individual experience, self-fulfilling and self-fulfilled.' Now there can be one *and only one* such experience, or *only one* significant whole, the significance of which is self-contained in the sense required. For it is *absolute* self-fulfilment, *absolutely* self-contained significance, that is postulated, and nothing short of *absolute* individuality—nothing short of *the* completely whole experience—can satisfy this postulate. And human knowledge—not merely *my* knowledge or *yours*, but the best and fullest knowledge in the world at any stage of its development—is clearly not a significant whole in this ideally complete sense. Hence the truth, which our sketch described, is—*from the point of view of the human intelligence*—an Ideal, and an Ideal which can never *as such*, or in its completeness, be actual as human experience."¹ (*Nature of Truth*, pp 78, 79.) Moreover, "in our view, it is the Ideal which is solid and substantial and fully actual. The finite experiences are rooted in the Ideal. They share its actuality, and draw from it whatever being and conceivability they possess."² (*ib.* p 82).

In all this Mr. Joachim's treatment is highly typical of rationalism. So far is he from recognising the necessary coincidence of the problem of

¹ Italics as in the original

² But contrast *op cit* pp 21, 22, where it is said that "this independent truth lives and moves and has its being in the judgments of finite minds. It is universal and single and timeless. But it is a single content or significance, which manifests itself as a system of knowledge which constitutes and is constituted by the intellectual individualities of many finite thinkers."

truth with that of error in the only practical way, namely, by treating them as one from the outset, that two-thirds of his book are devoted to an attempt to define truth, not in opposition to, but in abstraction from, error. When, however, he does at last turn to this "side of our subject which we have hitherto neglected," it has immediately to be acknowledged that "truth is everywhere confronted with falsehood, and error is the inseparable shadow of knowledge. The antagonism is vital to the nature of the conflicting contraries, and neither can be understood apart from the other" (*ib* p. 122).

And yet he has already committed himself to a theory of truth, and has even discussed the perplexities of its 'degrees.' But, since in all this he had omitted explicitly to raise the question which he now admits alone goes to the heart of the subject, the final 'shipwreck' of his argument does not astonish us so much as it seems to have astonished him. What does astonish us is his failure to understand the real meaning of this nemesis of dogmatism. He has to admit that the 'coherence-notion' of truth which he advocated is constitutionally incapable of furnishing a solution to the problem of error.¹ And he had already admitted that without an understanding of error we cannot understand the distinctive nature of truth. But why does he not perceive that these two admissions together amount to an admission that the problem of truth, properly so-called, is for him insoluble? It is not, as he himself thinks,

¹ *Op cit* pp 170, 171

that "the coherence-notion fails of complete success" (p. 178) in so far as it is itself incoherent, but rather that he has no solution of any sort to offer of the question which really interests us.

Mr. Joachim's persuasion that his conclusion is not purely negative, and that the coherence-notion can in some mysterious way survive its 'shipwreck' on the rock of error, is all the more pathetic in view of his attitude towards the 'correspondence-notion' of truth, *i.e.* the theory that truth consists in the 'correspondence' of thought with a 'reality' 'independent' of it. He begins by adopting the coherence-notion chiefly on account of an alleged incoherence in the correspondence-notion¹ The supposed contrast between the two is quite fictitious, by the way; but of this, more anon. He contends that his criticism of correspondence is confirmed "by exhibiting the helplessness of such a theory in face of the problem of error" (p. 126). But, if inability to deal with error is a good reason for discarding a theory of truth in the one case, why not in the other? Why should what is accounted a death-blow to the correspondence theory be reckoned only as an 'imperfection' in the coherence theory—an imperfection which "need not prevent its being *as true as a theory can be*, and more true (more near to complete coherence) than, *e.g.* theories of truth as correspondence or as a quality of independent entities"?² If such patent inco-

¹ Mr Joachim also criticises the theory of "Truth as a quality of Independent Entities" (chap. II), but this theory is treated as relatively unimportant.

² *Op cit* p. 178. Italics as in original.

herence does not warrant the rejection of a theory, what degree of incoherence will ? It seems as if Mr. Joachim meant to argue, on the one hand, that, because his opponents try to be as coherent as they can, therefore the Ideal Truth must be complete coherence ; and, on the other hand, that, because this ideal coherence is unrealisable, therefore absolutists, but no one else, are free to be as incoherent as they choose

Even now, however, we have not yet fathomed the rationalist conception of truth in its full incoherence. Our attention has next to be diverted to the formal interpretation of the problem of truth. It is implied in the following :

“ The tale of our disaster is not yet finished. For there remains a problem on which I have more than once touched, but which during this chapter [on “ The Negative Element and Error ”] has slipped into the background. Yet the difficulties which it presents to the coherence-notion are no less formidable than those we have just considered, and are of themselves sufficient to ensure our discomfiture. For truth, as it appears in human knowledge, is distributed over two opposed factors. Our knowledge is thought ‘ about ’ an Other ; and the opposition of the thought and its Other is apparently vital. Truth—*i.e.* such truth as we attain in judgment and inference—dwells neither in the thought nor in the thought’s Other, but in some sense in the union of the two. And the union, to which we give the name of ‘ correspondence,’ demands the independence and opposition of the factors which it unites. Now we saw long

ago that, if the coherence-notion is to approve itself, 'a continuous passage must be shown from that conception of things, which renders the coherence-notion possible, to the dualistic conception which is involved in correspondence.' Otherwise human knowledge remains, for all we can tell, unrelated to ideal experience" (pp. 171, 172).

What Mr. Joachim calls "the opposition of the thought and its Other" means that every assertion claims to be true of its object. But, since this feature is common to assertions which are really true and those which are really false, we are dealing with the purely formal view of truth. We learn further from this passage that the theory which calls itself monistic cannot in the end transcend the dualism of the correspondence-notion, though its ideal of truth demands such transcendence. We have here, therefore, a demand "which both *must be* and *cannot be* completely satisfied" (p. 171). Mr. Joachim's ideal is not only unrealisable in fact, it is also unrealisable in idea. The promise to relate the Ideal to human experience remains inevitably unfulfilled; and this failure deprives the Ideal of all meaning. Accordingly Mr. Joachim has to capitulate to the correspondence-notion which he had before repudiated.

"Even if we succeeded in reducing the problem of the dualism involved in human knowledge to a form of the first problem [*i.e.* that of error], we should still be confronted by an unsolved difficulty. For we should be no nearer to an intelligible con-

ception of this self-diremption of the ideal experience, and the continuous return from this 'Otherness' which is to constitute its concrete unity. And since all human discursive knowledge remains thought 'about' an Other, any and every theory of the nature of truth must itself be 'about' truth as its Other; *i.e.* the coherence-notion of truth *on its own admission* can never rise above the level of knowledge which at the best attains to the 'truth' of correspondence" (pp 174, 175).

Clearly, then, the coherence-notion does not heal the "separation of meaning from existence," for which it censures the correspondence-notion. But Mr. Joachim, in common with other absolutists, seems to have forgotten a most important point. If the absolutist theory of truth is 'about' Truth as its 'Other,' this is all the more reason why it should have a meaning of its own. And the trouble is that in the end we are left without the vaguest idea as to what 'complete coherence,' in the absolutist sense, really means. We cannot tell what the coherence theory intends to deny, for we have seen that it cannot in the end afford to repudiate the correspondence-notion. We cannot guess what it intends to affirm, for from this repudiation it derived its positive content. We cannot even understand in what sense it intends to claim truth for itself, for, 'on its own admission,' the only kind of truth it ultimately claims is the kind whose claim it initially rejected. And, while the ideal of 'complete coherence' is in the end thus defecated to a vague aspiration after it knows not what, such 'coherence' as is actually attain-

able sinks to the level of "mere formal consistency" (*op cit* p 117). Being unable to rise above, it inevitably falls below, the level of the 'truth of correspondence'. We looked for a theory both coherent and true of the nature of truth; we do not even get a coherent view of the nature of coherence.

Coherence is, beyond doubt, a most excellent thing, and we can hardly have too much of it. Humanistically interpreted, it is indeed the prerequisite, though, in view of the coherence of error, it cannot be called the exclusive prerogative of truth. That is to say, the demand for coherence is in the last resort a demand that an assertion be coherent in itself, *i.e.* that it should possess an intelligible meaning before it is decided whether that meaning is true or false. In this sense, however, the need for coherence rests upon the distinction, not between the true and the false, but between the significant and the unmeaning. This sense of coherence must retain paramount importance so long as men are prone to make meaningless 'assertions,' and so long as our human inability to give intelligent assent to such 'assertions' persists.

But it would seem that in Absolute Truth the sort of coherence which rules out meaningless assertions is no longer required. Thanks to the confluence of meaning with existence, this need has ideally disappeared. Thus the 'complete coherence' of absolutist parlance is *not* the perfection of coherence in its humanly significant sense. It is overtly, and even ostentatiously,

declared to be something wholly different and vastly superior. But why it should nevertheless be called by the same name does not appear ; and what it is in itself seems for ever hidden from human intelligence. Truth, says Mr. Joachim, is one thing, and coherence in the ordinary sense is another. But truth, he avers, *is* coherence, in that peculiar sense in which coherence is truth. Only his inability, so he explains, to tell us what that sense is prevents his theory from being both coherent and true.

If, finally, we avert our eyes from the tragic disintegration of this theory and search into its origin, we cannot find that it is relevant to any real question. The coherence-notion has confessedly afforded no solution of either (1) the problem of 'Otherness,' *i.e.* of the formal and general nature of judgment, or (2) the problem of truth in the strict sense in which 'true' excludes 'false'. But do not these two questions between them make up the whole problem of truth in any significant sense ? Mr. Joachim, at any rate, has not himself succeeded in giving to it any further meaning.

What he actually has done is this. At the outset he deals, so far as he can be said to deal with anything definite, with the formal nature of judgment ; and, taking the correspondence-notion as an attempted solution of this problem, he proposes to *substitute* the notion of 'identity,' between thought and its object, for that of 'otherness.'¹

¹ Cf *op cit* p 148 " As against the crude dualism of the correspondence-notion we are committed to some form of monism "

He thus creates the impression that he really has an alternative to propose. Moreover, just because he has omitted to ask what it is that he really wants to know, he creates the further impression that he is discussing the distinctive nature of truth. In the next stage of his argument he becomes dimly conscious that, from his own point of view, the worst fault of the correspondence-notion is that it is simply a formal statement of the problem to be solved. His dawning consciousness of the consequent unreality of his own solution now expresses itself as a desire to understand the "relation of the Ideal Truth to the truth of human judgment and inference" (p 84). That is to say, he begins to realise vaguely that the correspondence-notion concerns itself with the relation of human consciousness to 'reality', while the coherence-notion merely tries to define that same 'reality' by calling it 'one,' and describing it as one with—well, it is difficult to say with what, except that it certainly is not human, and probably not conscious¹ Hence, what seemed to be the most essential difference between the two theories turns out to be one of phrasing only. What the correspondence theory calls 'reality,' the coherence theory calls 'truth.' But, for both, *human* 'truth' consists in a reproduction of the 'reality'; and neither theory does anything more than register the problem which hereby emerges.

But, though neither theory accomplishes more than this, the coherence theory does a good deal

¹ *Op cit* § 28 (pp 81, 82).

less. For at bottom it is nothing more than an insidious attempt to suppress the problem of truth altogether. That is to say, what the correspondence theory avowedly contends for, the coherence theory reluctantly and confusedly admits. Its reluctance is disguised as criticism, and its confusion is offered as an alternative solution, but it never touches the real crux.

There is, to be sure, a slight difference between the two theories in their attitude towards human truth. But this difference merely serves to emphasise the confusedly sceptical character of the coherence theory, and so far is wholly to the advantage of the correspondence-notion. For the direct logical effect of describing 'reality' as 'one' is to stigmatise all human representations thereof, *i.e.* all our actual 'truths,' as intrinsically and incurably false; and this, not so much because none of them pretends to be final, as because none aspires to be exhaustive¹. Thus the only function which a 'monastic' theory can assign to human intelligence is that of *distorting* 'reality.' But if exact reproduction is a meaningless reduplication of existence, in what precise way does inexact reproduction enrich the Absolute's existence or enhance the value of our own? In point of fact, neither of the two theories between which we are asked to choose can show that the reproduction (or distortion) of 'reality' is of any earthly use, or that it fulfils any heavenly purpose. Neither theory is able to attach any meaning to the human dis-

¹ "If we are compelled to accept this contention [*viz.* that truths, in the plural, may be completely true] the coherence-notion of truth, as we have conceived it, cannot be maintained" (*op cit* p 89)

crimination between truth and error, or so much as attempts to show how it can come about ; though the correspondence theory has at least the negative merit of not intentionally denying the reality of human knowledge.

Thus Mr. Joachim's argument, when it comes to an end, has reached no conclusion , and the correspondence-notion, though *de jure* evicted as insolvent, remains *de facto* in sole possession of the premises. This is the whole explanation of the painful *débâcle* which forms the last stage of the argument. But Mr. Joachim himself, as we have seen, never perceives that in the end he has accomplished just nothing at all. The obscurity in which he had involved the question at the outset has enabled him, as the constituent elements thereof separate out and successively rise to the surface of his discussion, to set aside each in turn as a ' difficulty ' which we are encouraged to hope may be cleared up at a later stage of the argument. When, in the end, the so-called difficulty is shown to be insoluble, this is regretfully acknowledged, but recorded as indicating merely a partial ' imperfection ' of the best theory which Reality's outcast, man, can hope to attain.

The pity of it is that Mr. Joachim's shipwreck was indeed, as he himself avows,¹ ' inevitable.' It must be imputed, not to his defective seamanship, but to the craziness of the vessel to which he had entrusted his fortunes. He differs from other rationalists, not so much in his actual position, as by the fact that his intellectual acuteness renders

¹ *Op. cit* p 171

him more sensible to it, while his sincerity compels him to show how keenly he feels it. From time immemorial the Absolute has refused to work. Though *ex officio* all-inclusive, it has never yet been prevailed on to include finite experience, as such. Mr. Bradley's startling avowal, for example, that he does not any longer "believe in any reality outside of and apart from the totality of finite mind,"¹ does not enable us, nor apparently him, to understand any better than before how the Absolute 'overcomes' that antithesis between itself and 'finite mind' from which it derived its claim to superiority and the semblance of meaning it possessed. So long as this question is answered merely by a 'somehow,' the Absolute remains a mere name for an admittedly unsolved, and apparently insoluble, problem.

It is, however, worth noting that the very considerations which amount logically to an exposure of absolute idealism, furnish at the same time the psychological explanation of the peculiar charm which that doctrine exercises. This fact is specially evident in Mr. Bradley's system as stated in his *Appearance and Reality*.² For the more sharply Absolute Reality is contrasted with

¹ *Mind* (N S), No 62, p 179

² Mr Bradley himself, if we understand him aright, has now repented of that ideal of 'theoretical consistency' of which his book is the classical embodiment. For quite recently he has tried to outbid the Pragmatists by producing a 'practical creed,' described by himself as an "intelligent refusal to accept as final any theoretical criterion which actually so far exists." By this 'practical creed,' it seems, we are emancipated once and for all from the narrowness of all one-sided attempts at consistency' (*Mind* (N S), No 66, p 230). Mr Alfred Sidgwick, in N S No 67, p 368, has some instructive comments on these last straits of rationalism.

'finite mind,' the more definite must its meaning appear, so long as we refrain from asking how it can mean anything at all, while, in transcending this antithesis, what the Absolute loses in meaning it gains in majesty and mystery. And, of course, the final evanescence of this meaning will be the less noticeable, inasmuch as from the first the meaning was more apparent than real.

Now in Mr. Bradley's Absolute both *systole* and *diastole* of this mighty pulsation attain their completest expression. For Absolute Reality, which is *ex vi termini* the absolutely real, seems to get positive significance, to start with, from a sharp contrast with the world of our experience, which it condemns *en bloc* as 'mere appearance.'

This tremendous initial distinction, however, between human thought and reality seems on reflection to bewilder rather than to enlighten. For the indwelling principle, in virtue of which the Absolute, though literally unspeakable, lays claim to supreme reality, is that very 'principle of contradiction' which is upheld as the expression of our purely human demand for intellectual satisfaction. As Prof. Dewey well says:

"Long familiarity has not dulled my astonishment at finding exactly the same set of considerations, which in the earlier portion of the book are employed to condemn reality as experienced by us to the region of Appearance, employed in the latter portion of the book to afford a triumphant demonstration of the existence and general character of Absolute Reality." (*Mind* (N.S.), No. 63, p. 321.)

According to Mr. Bradley, the Absolute (1) is a necessity of thought, (2) enters into its inheritance by reason of the 'suicide' of thought. Proposition (1) is established by the contention that thought demands a reality that shall be absolutely free from self-contradiction, proposition (2) by proving that nothing thinkable can satisfy this demand as he interprets it. And these two propositions together define the essential nature of the Absolute; and therefore must be taken as an illustration of what is meant by saying that it is "such that it does not contradict itself". We here get a strange variant of the '*Cogito ergo sum*' of Descartes, blended with an equally strange variant of the 'ontological argument.' The theses are—"I think, therefore I am not real, but the Absolute is", and "Reality must be such as to satisfy an idea which is unthinkable for me".

Nevertheless it may freely be confessed that there is no possibility of combating Mr. Bradley's theory of the essentially suicidal nature of thought otherwise than by that conception of the nature of meaning which we owe to Mr. A. Sidgwick, and which may be condensed into the dictum, "Meaning lies in application." Conversely, to adopt this view is definitely to abandon that purely formal conception of proof which underlies all rationalistic reasoning.

The rationalistic assumption that the 'principle of contradiction' is so fundamental, so absolute, so undeniable, and so unambiguous, that it may forthwith be applied regardless of consequences, naturally leads to an absolutely uncritical and

utterly barren use of the principle. We come here upon the ultimate clash between the ideals of formal logic and of a critical logic which studies thought in action and principles in use. Mr. Sidgwick's contention is that reckless reliance on so-called *a priori* truths is the essence of formal reasoning; and that the purely formal turns out to be the purely verbal. Hence genuine, as opposed to merely verbal, criticism of abstract principles means essentially their reconsideration and reinterpretation in the light of the use actually made of them. To use a principle is, in fact, at once to define its meaning and to test its validity. On the other hand, abstract 'truths,' taken in their abstractness—*i.e.* apart from their practical working—can be said to have a meaning by courtesy only. In this state of their being the 'meaning' is a mere potentiality—and always highly indeterminate at that. The proposition 'means' whatever anyone can manage to assert with it. If, however, a 'truth' cannot be used at all in the organisation of our experience, then to credit it with a meaning is to stretch courtesy beyond the bounds of reason. Thorough-going inapplicability means a break-down, not only as regards validity, but even as regards sense; and such a break-down is only verbally disguised by affixing the label of 'mere appearance' to the facts which inconveniently refuse to disappear on the incantation of a wordy formula. In general it follows that the more unquestioning the theoretic confidence inspired by the *a priori* character of an 'axiom,' the more effectively will

it lead us astray in practice. But it is only by sad experience of the practical failures of 'self-evident' principles that we discover the guile that lurked in them. Hence we may say that there are no *a priori* truths; there are only *a priori* fallacies.¹

Thus the pragmatic principle 'meaning lies in application,' though the fruit of much experience, is in a profound sense logically prior to all other principles whatsoever. In flouting this more fundamental principle, Mr. Bradley supplies as striking an illustration and confirmation thereof as could well be desired. For so he is enabled to 'prove' that self-contradiction is of the very essence of human thought. Since, according to Mr. Bradley, to think at all is to contradict one's self, it follows that where there is no self-contradiction there is, humanly speaking, no meaning. Which is, of course, a direct inversion of the only useful interpretation of the 'principle of contradiction,' viz. that a real self-contradiction involves a failure of meaning. For a person who contradicts *himself* by embracing both of a pair of mutually exclusive alternatives, makes it not so much unnecessary as impossible for anyone else to contradict him intelligently. In other words, it is a prime requisite of meaning in any discussion that the functions of denial and assertion should be exercised by different persons. Finally, we may observe that in the light of Mr. Bradley's interpretation of the 'principle of contradiction,' his statement that "ultimate reality is such that

¹ Cf. Mr. A. Sidgwick on "Applied Axioms," in *Mind* (N.S.), No. 53

it does not contradict itself,"¹ takes on the character of a fatal admission rather than of an extravagant claim. If we take his own interpretation of the terms used, the statement means that his 'reality,' in order to rid itself of error, has purged its system of all significance. While, if we adhere to the useful interpretation of 'self-contradiction,' we must say that his 'reality' is such that it *does* contradict itself. For, according to him, the formal laws of our thinking compel us to believe in an 'absolute reality' whose absoluteness entails our inability to think it, and whose reality therefore, if we could really believe in it or even barely conceive it, would *ipso facto* be reduced to 'mere appearance.' Thus the Absolute, as such, is 'riddled with contradictions,' and its ideal freedom from self-contradiction is in reality only an aggravation of its unhappy state. In a word, it is intrinsically meaningless.

But perhaps finite intelligence should not presume to criticise the Absolute. It must be admitted that the critic here is at a signal disadvantage. For absolutists themselves allow that they are partly human; and one never knows at any given moment whether a human absolutist is standing on his human or his absolute leg. Any criticism whatsoever of any absolutist system may be met by saying that the objections which seem insuperable 'from the point of view of the human intelligence' are invisible from the standpoint of the Absolute. Let it be granted then, for the sake of argument, that the Absolute has a meaning,

¹ *Appearance and Reality*, p. 136

even if this meaning resides in the Absolute alone, and not at all in the mind of man. Let us concede that so long as the Absolute knows what it means, it matters not that *we* can never know what *we* mean by saying so. Let us grant all this; for otherwise we shall never get on from that part of Mr. Bradley's book which is entitled 'Appearance' to the more inspiring part which discourses of 'Reality'

We can now ask, to what use does Mr Bradley put his Absolute once he has got it? The tale is soon told. Having vindicated its own title to perfect significance by rejecting as self-contradictory whatsoever has had, or ever will have, the irretrievable misfortune to become an object of human thought, the absolutely real quietly assumes the rôle of the really absolute; and having thus once more included, *ex vi termini*, all that the absolutely real verbally excludes, it can proceed triumphantly to 'absorb' and to 'transmute' our human thought with all its contradictions. But *how* it achieves this, and *what* it makes of our experience, is its own closely kept secret, which it could not reveal to human intelligence even if it would. Thus the Absolute's eternal life consists in (verbally) 'overcoming' an absolute but unintelligible distinction between itself and the only kind of reality that *we* can ever hope to know. So that the Absolute, which originally gained its footing in our thought by promising us 'intellectual satisfaction,' in the end retains its position by ministering to our emotional capacity for uncomprehending awe.

But we need not follow up our enquiry into the emotional value of an incomprehensible Absolute, nor even explicitly raise the question wherein such an Absolute now differs from the agnostic's Unknowable. For our immediate purpose it is enough to note that the final 'difficulties' of absolutism to which Mr Joachim succumbs are neither factitious nor novel, nor due to any fault of exposition. They are inherent in the vitals of the system. The logical situation, in short, is that depicted by Dr. Schiller in his essay on 'Absolutism and Religion'

"It has now for more than a quarter of a century been recognised by absolutist philosophy that there exists at its core a serious gap between the human mind and the superhuman 'ideal' which it deifies, and that it possesses no logical bridge by which to pass from the one to the other." (*Studies in Humanism*, p 282.)

After referring to T H Green's confession that these two 'aspects' of consciousness, *qua* human and *qua* eternal, "cannot be comprehended in a single conception,"¹ Dr Schiller continues.

"This being so, it is interesting to see what his friends and followers have made of a situation which ought surely to be intolerable to a rational theory. Has its rationalistic pride been in any way abated? Not a whit. Has its doctrine ceased to be taught? Not at all. Has it been amended? In no wise. Have attempts been made to bridge the chasm? No, but its existence has repeatedly been 'recognised.' Mr.

¹ Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*, § 68.

Bradley 'recognises' it as the problem how the Absolute 'transmutes' 'appearances' (=the world of our experience) into 'reality' (=his utopian ideal), but his answer is merely that the trick is achieved by a gigantic 'somehow' Mr. Joachim 'recognises' it as 'the dual nature of human experience,' but will not throw over it even a mantle of words. Prof. J. S. Mackenzie 'recognises' it by remarking 'that a truly conceptual object cannot, properly speaking, be contained in a divine mind, any more than in a human mind, unless the divine mind is *something wholly different from anything* that we understand by a mind.'¹ Has the difficulty led to any analysis of its grounds, or revision of its assumptions? Not to my knowledge. It has been 'recognised,' and is now recognised as 'old'² and familiar and venerable; and what more would you have? Surely not an answer? Surely not a Rationalism which shall be rational? It is, and remains, a 'difficulty,' and that is the end of it" (pp 282, 283).

Our original suspicions of absolutism have now been fully confirmed. Not only is it not a theory of real truth at all, but it is not even a theory of formal truth. Its failure to discriminate, in the beginning, the two senses of 'truth' has reduced the whole question to nonsense.

It is this state of affairs which has prompted Dr. Schiller to make a capital point of the

¹ *Mind*, xv (N S), No. 59, p. 326, note (The italics are Dr Schiller's)

² "As we have seen, it is essentially as old as Plato" [Author's note]

'Ambiguity of Truth.'¹ All actual judgments claim truth, but not all are able to make their claim good, i.e. not all alike are valid. Hence, in treating of the formal nature of judgment, or of truth-claims, it is not only permissible, but imperative, to abstract from the distinction between truth and error. But, when a formal enquiry into the general nature of judgment is, under one guise or another, made to do duty as a critical enquiry into the nature of the distinction between true judgments and false, what can result but verbalism and confusion?

For more than two thousand years the devotees of pure Intellect, under the impression that in this name they were worshipping Truth, have been sacrificing, not only their own time, but all the time there is, at the altar of the false goddess, Truth-claim. If, therefore, humanist criticism had done nothing more than show that the distinction between truth-claim and truth as validity, however obvious and undeniable in the abstract, may yet in the actual practice of philosophers be wholly forgotten, to the ruin of all logical meaning—if it had done no more than this it would still mark a turning-point in philosophic history.

But humanist criticism has done much more than this to vindicate its essentially constructive purport. It has laid its finger on the precise point at which absolutism has cut itself off from the possibility of dealing effectively, or otherwise than merely verbally, with this crucial question of the

¹ Briefly, in his essay on 'Truth,' in *Humanism*, pp. 57 and 98, note, and fully in the fifth essay in *Studies in Humanism*.

nature of the distinction between truth and error. And in doing so it has made clear a definite issue between itself and absolutism. For, if Dr. Schiller is right, the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* of absolutist modes of thinking lies in their abstraction from the temporal aspect of thought and their consequent 'depersonalisation' of the judgment, *i.e.* their abstraction from that contribution to the total context of the judgment which comes from its origination in an individual mind and its usefulness for others. Humanism is nothing more nor less than the correction of these abstractions. Dr. Schiller has here driven home the lesson—first distinctly enunciated by Mr Sidgwick—that the actual meaning of an assertion is relative to its context. This is really only another way of saying that 'meaning lies in application.' But Dr Schiller's point is that the concrete context, to which the actual meaning is relative, is not (as for absolutism) vaguely the universe at large, nor even (as for Mr Sidgwick) the sort of cases for which the judgment is intended, but still more specifically and essentially the actual purpose of the man who makes and uses it.¹ Apart from such use, the questions which we can raise about its 'meaning' become matters of mere grammar. For the grammarian, the 'meaning' of an assertion (or rather, sentence) is the average meaning which the average man who 'knows its meaning' understands in an average context. From this position to the idea that words and sentences have really

¹ In principle this is also what Prof J Dewey means by calling thought 'instrumental'. But Dr Schiller has emphasised more than anyone else the personal character of this psychological context.

in some mysterious way a permanent meaning apart from context and from actual use, is a step which mythopœic man finds fatally seductive. And, having once taken this step, he can manufacture 'eternal verities' at will by the easy process of neglecting the human applications which alone could confer real meaning on them or put that meaning to the test. The conviction, or rather assumption, that the 'objectivity of truth' must be interpreted as meaning that truth is essentially timeless and impersonal, we shall in future call 'objectivism,' though perhaps its proper name should be the 'grammarian's fallacy.'

We have already seen that the philosophy which pre-eminently prides itself on its 'objective' treatment of thought is quite incapable of coping with the problem of error. It now appears that it is this very objectivism which is the source of its helplessness. As Dr. Schiller contends, and Mr. Joachim proudly insists,¹ it is just the fully concrete personal and temporal context of the judgment which 'objective' idealism systematically treats as non-existent. But this makes the distinction between truth and error nugatory and inapplicable. 'Truth,' taken in this 'objective' way, is, and eternally remains, truth-claim only; all verification is of necessity a temporal process and an affair of personal experience. This epistemological contrast thus yields the most distinctive mark of Humanism.

It is of course quite true that to allow the logical relevance of the personal and temporal aspects of

¹ See *The Nature of Truth*, pp. 167, 168

thought is to blunt the sharpness of the traditional distinction between logic and psychology. But the question now raised is precisely whether logic can survive its complete severance from psychology. After all, distinctions between sciences are not heaven-sent revelations. They have all been made by man, presumably for some purpose ; and this exposes them to revision whenever they fail to fulfil that purpose. Now, ever since Aristotle, it has been agreed that it is characteristic of logic to take cognisance of the difference between true judgments and false. But this is precisely what the 'objective,' or non-psychological, treatment of logic has so far failed to do. To depersonalise thought succeeds in distinguishing logic from psychology only by reducing it to grammar. Nay, it now appears that to abstract from the reference of thought to time is of itself enough to destroy the very distinction between logical and 'merely psychological' thinking on which 'objective' logic based its claims. Logical validity is not to be gained by this cheap and easy way of cutting adrift from psychical fact and making 'truths' immutable by taking them 'out of time.'

For to say that logic must deal with the distinction between truth and error is to admit that it is essentially the science of criticism. Criticism is the revision of previously accepted 'truths'. This revision cannot be purely *a priori*, dialectical or formal ; it must be a process of adjusting preconceived notions to the facts of progressive experience ; for, as we have seen, principles get

their meaning from the uses to which they are put. But 'objective truth' was, by definition, absolute, eternal, and unalterable. It is therefore insusceptible of revision. Hence to apply this notion of 'objective truth' to any actual belief is to regard such belief as *de jure* beyond the reach of criticism. Thus objectivism is the negation of criticism, it is indistinguishable from pure dogmatism, and soars beyond the domain of a critical logic altogether.

It is, moreover, equally indistinguishable from pure scepticism. For it can never meet the challenge, 'How do you ever find beliefs that actually are objectively true?' Objectivism gladly grants man a monopoly for the unrestricted production and distribution of error, but allows him no share in the manufacture of truth. For error is 'subjective,' and truth 'objective.' They are thus assigned respectively to totally different spheres of being, and no longer denote discriminative valuations within human experience. How can 'truth' so 'objective' as this ever become an object of human thought? Truth has been *defined* as unattainable; and what is this but absolute scepticism?

The fact that objectivism may be indifferently regarded as dogmatism or as scepticism sounds paradoxical. But the paradox is most instructive. It means that uncritical acceptance and indiscriminate rejection of truth-claims both come to the same thing, namely formalism. In either case 'truth' becomes an idle word. Objectivism dogmatically asserts its belief in the existence of an

unimprovable truth, which it sceptically hastens to add is unprovable and unattainable by man. Thus it doubly renounces the duty of helping man to sift the true from the false in his actual beliefs. How then can it be said to deal with the problem of truth at all? Instead of reaching, as it professes, a super-truth, has it not contented itself with infra-truth, or truth-claim?

But perhaps we may conclude that objectivism, alike whether it denies the possibility of error or the possibility of knowledge, *i.e.* whether it calls itself dogmatism or scepticism, is essentially a piece of academic make-believe. No sane man would dream of appealing to its logic for guidance in life or for the advancement of science. As human beings with practical needs and scientific interests, we simply cannot afford to relax our efforts to 'discern' truth, *i.e.* to separate it out from that undifferentiated magma of the true and false with which truth-claims initially supply us. This process, moreover, never comes to a standstill. When we ask what is the effective or applicable meaning of 'truth,' we can only answer that a belief is true so long as it holds good, *i.e.* so long as it does the work required of it. And this 'holding good' is relative to the concrete experience of the persons for whom it holds good. Contrariwise, a belief that fails under the experience-test is discarded as 'false'. But, for us, both truth and error come into existence in the very process of being 'found out'. The distinction between truth and error, when thus brought within human experience, is one of which we make

continuous use. It is for those who claim that the distinction has some other meaning to explain how that supposed meaning can be applied to concrete cases. Otherwise the alleged meaning is mere 'sound and fury, signifying nothing.'

We have now shown that of the current notions of Truth the absolutist notion is devoid of all real meaning, while the humanist notion is contrived to supply its deficiency. But, for the sake of clearness, we may now briefly summarise our contentions.

For knowledge to be possible, human thought must be supplied with 'objects' which man's thought can measure. But we are not concerned with this merely formal relation of thought to its 'objects'; what we are concerned with is the question why some of them are valued as 'real' and others discarded as 'unreal.' Still more precisely, what we are concerned with is the progressive remodelling to which our thought-world is subjected. So long as we are content to consider the relation of thought and 'object' statically, or *sub specie æternitatis*, the 'object' remains merely formal, and the thought remains mere truth-claim. Whatever can be said of the 'object' thus considered is as applicable to the object of a false judgment as to that of a true. Hence the distinction between 'true' and 'false,' 'real' and 'unreal,' only becomes applicable, *i.e.* only acquires real meaning, when thought is taken in its dynamic and temporal aspect. To dehumanise truth, therefore, is to extract and cast aside its very essence. And conversely, reality,

as known to us, becomes inseparable from human striving. For indefeasible reality is not given to us at the outset, not is it ever reached without prolonged and laborious trials.

Moreover, the 'independence' which thought ascribes to whatever is taken as real is likewise formal, in that it does nothing to explain how the discrimination between 'real' and 'unreal' is effected. Indeed the more this 'independence' is emphasised the more irresistibly are we driven to look elsewhere for the essential nature of truth. Considered as merely 'independent,' the object is not concerned to impress its nature upon *us*; nor yet to impress the 'right' view of its nature rather than the 'wrong' one; *it* does not induce us to correct 'mistaken' views, and to supplant a worse view by a better. All this is specifically *our* concern and our doing. It is by us that mistakes are made, and it is by us that they are unmade. Our anxiety to avoid making them would be perfectly irrational if, when once they were made, the need for replacing them by something better could never be brought home to us. And nothing more nor less than this is what humanists mean when they speak of the 'making of truth' by man. No declaration of the object's 'independence' is relevant to our problem, nor can it be allowed to prevail over the rights of man to the possession of truth. So far Humanism merely states the vital problem. But, once we are determined to face it, how can we avoid defining truth essentially in terms of human interest?

No infallible criterion of absolute truth, cer-

tainly, can be found in this way; we cannot pretend to possess a 'truth' that can never play us false. The bare existence of error makes such pretence a mockery. But against this admission of human fallibility may be set the proved inability of absolutism to fulfil its pledges, *i.e.* to provide any applicable criterion whatsoever. Our actual truths always inhere in time and in personality, and, as both are inexhaustible, remain susceptible of limitless improvement. Thus, though actually 'true,' they are potentially 'false'; for they may be rendered out of date. But this does not detract from their essential truthfulness so long as they serve their purpose; nor, when they prove erroneous, is their error absolute. The notion of 'absolutes,' whether of truth or of error, is utterly formal

That abstract truths are proved true only by approving and embodying themselves in concrete personal experience, that truth-seeking must be truth-testing; and that the final test of truth is the capacity of beliefs to express and maintain themselves in action—such is the answer which humanists agree in giving to the great question which they alone have unequivocally raised. In short, it is evident that the mere raising of this question entails a revolution in philosophy and a systematic reinterpretation of all its problems, while the applications of the humanist answers to every department of life are so varied and inexhaustible as fully to justify the commotion which the rise of Humanism provoked in the pallid realms of technical philosophy.

IV

WHAT IS PRAGMATISM ?

By JAMES BISSETT PRATT, Ph.D.

[A Review published in *Mind*, October 1909]

THIS book consists of a series of six popular lectures, originally delivered in 1908 at an American 'Summer School.' As Mr Pratt explains in his preface, his object has been to produce "a book which (while not presupposing any prior knowledge of the subject) shall present, with some attempt at comprehensiveness and unity, the position of those who find themselves unable to accept the pragmatist view" (pp. ix-x). He also tells us. "When the movement first began I was an enthusiastic pragmatist, and my enthusiasm lasted until I came to understand clearly what it really meant" (p x). Thus the book presents a novelty to science in that its author is the first known case of a convert *from* pragmatism. But in it we find none of the traditional acrimony of the convert. On the contrary, the book is a model of controversial fairness and good-temper. Nevertheless its perusal yields no clear answer to the question, Why has Mr. Pratt renounced Pragmatism? In part his relapse into a hesitating Intellectualism seems due to his *not* having, after all, quite clearly under-

stood what pragmatists 'really mean.' But his objections to pragmatism cannot all be regarded as misapprehensions of the actual intentions of pragmatist writers. In part they are due to his persuasion that, whatever the actual aims of real live pragmatists, the ideal pragmatist (of whom Prof. Dewey is apparently the nearest earthly representative) is logically imprisoned in Solipsism, a *Weltanschauung* which Mr. Pratt is doubtless right in regarding as practically untenable. Such a position on the part of a critic is of course by no means indefensible in the abstract. But Mr. Pratt's conclusion that, "if strictly carried out to its logical conclusions, pragmatism is essentially a philosophy of scepticism" (p 210), seems hard to reconcile with the concessions he makes to pragmatic theory, and the tribute he pays some of its actual achievements.

"Certain it is that the only truths we know or can know contain *ipso facto* a human element, and that this element cannot be lightly despised. It is in the pointing out of just this fact . . . that the chief merit of pragmatism or humanism lies. . . . We have only sincere admiration for the brilliant exposition given by them [James, Schiller and Dewey] of the contributions which we men make to our own truth" (pp. 56-57).

"Our beliefs are intellectual tools which serve us in more or less useful ways. The process by which they get themselves verified and thus cease to be mere claims and become truths, . . . all this can be traced within the stream of consciousness as concrete psychic fact. . . . The truth is that

which works best, and that which works best is the truth. Successful working is thus the tag or ear-mark by which we distinguish the true idea " (pp. 60-62)

" In its attack upon the identification of truth with reality, pragmatism has done a genuine service to the cause of clear thinking " (p. 55).

The difficulty of harmonising Mr Pratt's commendation and condemnation of pragmatism is enhanced when we observe that what he concedes with one hand he is apt to take back with the other. In the second of the above-quoted passages he speaks of claims *becoming* truths by the process of verification. He even goes so far as to say (p 87) that " the pragmatist contention that a claim must be verified in order to become ' a truth ' is neither novel nor open to any serious criticism." And yet he finishes this last sentence by saying. " But the pragmatist takes it for granted that once this is admitted it follows that the claim is *made true* by being verified and that its trueness consists in its verification." That is to say, he requires us to draw a distinction between " becoming a truth by being verified " and " being made true by being verified." ¹ Mr. Pratt's position, so far as we can gather with the help of the explanations given on pages 58-59, is that the pragmatist theory of the relation of ' truth ' to ' working ' is so unobjectionable in itself that for the sake of peace he will " agree to define " truth in those terms ; while the consequences of accepting that definition are so momentous and so

¹ Cf p 59, note, where the confusion seems to reach a climax

horrible that for the sake of truth he must energetically repudiate the substance of the definition.

In justice, however, to Mr Pratt, we hasten to add that his defence of unverified truth is by far the weakest thing in the book, and we will not linger over it. He shows to much better controversial advantage in his main line of attack.

"The complete definition of knowledge," he says, "must include something which distinguishes the true from the false, a reference to a reality beyond the experience itself which makes it true . . . Here in fact is the crucial point of the controversy—the pragmatists insisting that knowledge can be sufficiently described and defined without going beyond the experience of the knowing individual; the non-pragmatists maintaining that a reference to something outside of his experience is essential. And, in a sense, the whole problem may be said to hinge on the question of mistaken or false opinion. How will the pragmatist interpret this? The question really is unavoidable. When one is mistaken but satisfied, does he know?" (pp 164-167) [The prior and really relevant question is, How does A *know* that B *is* mistaken?] "Unless there be transcendence, there is no criterion for judging between two opinions, except, of course, the relative subjective satisfactoriness of the two" (p. 169).

Mr. Pratt hardly goes far enough in saying that 'in a sense' the problem turns on the question of discriminating truth from error. Pragmatists have been at pains to point out that this is the

really vital issue. But our author fails to see that what we want is not a verbal distinction between truth and error, but an explanation of how mistakes are actually detected and corrected. He has not grasped the really revolutionary character of pragmatist logic ; and so has not realised how largely his criticism rests on preconceptions as to the function of logic which pragmatism directly challenges. He would hardly have so missed the real *fundamentum* of the controversy if he had included the writings of Alfred Sidgwick in his study of pragmatist literature.

I repeat that the Sidgwickian attitude in logic amounts to a revolution in that science. For whereas the old, or intellectualist, logic ambitiously inquired into the ideal meaning of ' truth ' for an *infallible* consciousness, and then contented itself with a merely *formal* answer, pragmatist logic humbly asks, What must be the actual meaning of ' truth ' for a *fallible* consciousness such as ours ?—and then insists on getting a *real* answer. It insists, that is, on knowing how truth and rationality must be conceived, if truth-seeking is to be a rational pursuit *for us*. Nor can it be too much emphasised that the pragmatic identification of truth with usefulness primarily concerns the ' truths ' of logic as such. Logical ' truths,' when so ' refined ' and ' abstract ' as to be incapable of *utilisation* in the establishment of concrete truths, are of use only to those who make a not too reputable living by teaching them. The humanist may be excused for describing so limited a utility as practical uselessness. And to the

question how this kind of practical uselessness is to be distinguished from theoretical meaninglessness no intellectualist philosopher has as yet given an intelligible answer.

For those who like their problems served up in a severely technical form, and look with suspicion on any formulation of the fundamental philosophical problem in which the phrase 'possibility of knowledge' does not occur, we humbly submit the problem in this form : How must Knowledge and Error be defined, in order that (a) the possibility of attaining knowledge, and (b) liability to error can simultaneously inhere in one and the same mind ? Intellectualist philosophers have invariably attempted to frame a conception of 'absolute truth' which shall *exclude* all possibility of error *ex officio*. *I e* they have arbitrarily substituted, for the useful distinction between truth and error, a relation of mutual exclusiveness between the possibility of knowledge and the possibility of error—and then they have been naively surprised to find that the bare fact of our human liability to error must *ex hypothesi* eternally debar us from attaining to real 'knowledge.' And as in his capacity of a human being the devotee of 'absolute truth' is not himself an incarnation thereof, his logical position would seem to be extremely delicate, not to say perilous. The philosopher who regards truth and infallibility as inseparable must either gain the Whole Truth or be hurled to intellectual perdition. He must either become a Super-Pope or else an utter sceptic.

Such is the dilemma we would oppose to the one in which Mr. Pratt asks us to choose between pragmatism and the principle of contradiction (p. 121). His dilemma would have force only if pragmatism had claimed to possess an infallible criterion of absolute truth—the very thing the proved futility of which has called pragmatism into existence! In fact all that Mr. Pratt's dilemma really proves is that the correspondence notion is as purely formal as the abstract principle of contradiction itself. The abstract 'truth' that A cannot be both B and not-B does not help us to make up our minds as to which of these two A really is. Neither does the correspondence theory. Intellectualism indeed, as a 'system of thought,' is just the systematic neglect of this question, which the pragmatist's coarsely practical mind insists on regarding as the real problem of logic. Now Mr. Pratt admits that the pragmatic principle *alone* enables us to decide between real alternatives. As the only way of discovering error is by practical failure, so the only *applicable criterion* for distinguishing truth from error is that of experimental success. What meaning then is left in the assertion that the correspondence theory does, and the pragmatic principle does not, 'distinguish the true from the false'? Of what use to us is 'something which distinguishes the true from the false' *per se*, if it does not enable *us* so to distinguish it?

Ultimately, Mr. Pratt's theory of truth is an attempt to combine two conceptions of 'truth' which are not only severally futile, but are also,

so far as they have any apparent meaning, of the Kilkenny-cat description when combined. He demands a 'truth' which shall be (a) 'true' of a transcendent 'reality,' (b) theoretically infallible. Now the first demand, while assuming that for truth to exist 'reality' must be independent, at the same time defines that independence as *independence of verification*. For if a belief, in order to be 'true,' must 'correspond' with a 'reality' which preserves its independence by remaining *transcendent*, then we can never *know* that it is true, nor can we ever discover it to be false.¹ In short, 'transcendence' means independence of verification; and that is why we say it has no real meaning at all. *Per contra*, the second demand is one for *absolute verification*. The only thing that these two demands have in common is that neither can justify either the adoption or rejection of any actual assertion about reality. Each therefore 'makes knowledge impossible' in the only legitimate sense of that sorely misused expression. That is to say, knowledge, as 'theoretically' defined, in practice ceases to be any concern of *ours*. For if 'reality' is 'independent' (in the sense defined) of our judgments, then, reciprocally, our judgments must be independent of it. In deciding for or against any proffered 'truth,' we must be guided by something more rational than the vain desire to get in touch with a 'reality' which is *ex hypothesi* beyond our reach. If, on the other hand, we are not prepared to face

¹ Cf. Dr. Schiller on "The Rationalistic Conception of Truth" in *Aristot. Soc. Proc.* for 1908-9

the risk of deciding 'wrongly,' *i e* of having subsequently to change our minds, then we shall do wisely to take up some other occupation than that of thinking. Risk is as inalienable a condition of intellectual as of physical life

Another objection to which Mr. Pratt attaches importance is that " the test of truth is one thing ; the nature of truth is another " (p 75). Or, as he puts it elsewhere " The meaning or nature of a material, a quality, a relation, is one thing ; the sign by which you make sure of its presence is another. And in like manner . . . the ear-mark by which we have now learned to tell a true idea from a false one [*i e* by 'successful working'] does not answer the further question, what we mean by its being true " (p. 64). The distinction in question is indeed, as Mr. Pratt says, ' obvious,' but, in the use he makes of it, it is meaningless. For if *every* condition that justifies our bestowing the name A on a given thing be classed as a mere ' tag ' of A, what will be left over to constitute the ' meaning ' of A ? The distinction, when taken so absolutely as Mr. Pratt takes it in the case of ' truth,' becomes a distinction between *all* the nameable characteristics of A on the one side and the unknowable nature of A as a *Ding-an-sich* on the other. The pragmatist's way of avoiding this Charybdis of the Thing-in-itself is to retort that whatever we agree to accept as the *ultimate test* of whether so-called A deserves its name, becomes for us the meaning of that name. Thus an inquiry into the *ultimate applicable criterion* of truth is the sole form that any inquiry into the

meaning of truth can take, if that inquiry is itself to have any real meaning

The charge of Solipsism which Mr. Pratt brings against pragmatism¹ must be dealt with more briefly. Stated as concisely as possible, his argument is this. To identify the concrete truth of an assertion with the experiences which validate it is to reduce all reality—and therefore the reality of other selves—to conscious states of the experiencing individual. It is possible that *Deweyism* may lend itself to this interpretation—except in so far as by minimising the importance of personality it tends to substitute a sort of pan-subjectivism for solipsism. But Prof. Dewey, I apprehend, may well be left to take care of himself. It is noteworthy, though, that our author seeks to fortify his position by quoting a criticism of Dewey on James (pp 202-203). It is, in fact, quite certain that James and Schiller expressly repudiate the ultra-subjectivist *intentions* which Mr. Pratt attributes to Dewey². And I fail to see why, even if Dewey has overshot the mark, James and Schiller must necessarily be made to suffer for it, or why the good that Mr. Pratt admits is to be found in pragmatism must necessarily come to so bad an end. However, I cannot now do much more than suggest that here again the root of the trouble is that, when pragmatists mention the word 'truth,' Mr. Pratt's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of infallibility. But, as we have

¹ Pp 121-123 and note. In principle Lecture V (on "Pragmatism and Religion") is a development of this line of attack

² Cf Dr Schiller on *Solipsism*, in *N S*, No 70 especially pp 170-171 and 180 f

already seen, it is just this identification of truth with infallibility which, while it leads to absolute idealism when one regards one's self as an official mouthpiece of the Infinite, leads to absolute scepticism in one's private capacity as a 'finite centre.' In fact, as Dr Schiller has demonstrated, since the Absolute is a Solipsist, in trying to be as like It as we can, we too must become solipsists. If therefore pragmatism also should in the end lead to solipsism, then solipsism must indeed be the Rome to which all philosophical paths converge. But the truth is rather that this Rome, like that other, is a predestined goal only for those who, with hearts set on infallibility, have the intelligence to recognise its incompatibility with the right of private judgment.

Because he has not realised this aspect of the case Mr Pratt has misconceived the real nature of the opposition between the correspondence-theory of truth and pragmatism. They are not, as he supposes, conflicting answers to one and the same question. Pragmatism (of the James-Schiller variety at least) is not, as he supposes, a denial of the formal relation of 'otherness' as between 'subject' and 'object.' It is essentially the determination to substitute the spirit of living, progressive, human truth for the dead formalism of the cult of verbal 'exactitude' and dogmatic 'finality.' We simply deprecate as futile the assuming of a *transcendent and absolute* reality as the standard to which our actual judgments are to 'correspond.' For (a) if an absolute standard were available for actual comparison the com-

parison itself would be purely superfluous. We should already be *de facto* in possession of absolute and infallible certitude. And (b) to say that the reality is transcendent is simply to say that it is *not* available as a standard at all. We do indeed distinguish, in all our judgments, between the circumambient 'reality' and our own private 'experience'. But, in the first place, this distinction is *within* 'experience' in the wider sense; and it is this wider sense which is relevant to pragmatic theory. And, in the second place, the 'reality,' or environment, that we so distinguish ourselves from, is still reality *as it appears to us*; so that at any given moment our beliefs must be in exact formal correspondence with it. That *this* reality corresponds with our judgments is only another way of saying that it responds to, and keeps step with, every advance in our knowledge. Hence this immanent 'reality' avails as little as the unknowable transcendent 'reality' to stamp our actual beliefs with finality—though for precisely the opposite reason. Just because it is accessible to thought, it does not itself possess finality. Thus the pragmatic objection to the correspondence-theory is not that we cannot distinguish between ourselves and the environment, whether material or spiritual, to which we consciously react. We insist that this conscious reaction, which is always experimental, is the very marrow of the distinction. Our real objection to the correspondence-theory, in the form in which it is held by Mr. Pratt, is that the 'theory' is essentially a confusion between the immanent 'reality'

which is known, but is not absolute for knowledge nor rigidly indifferent to our purposes, and the 'absolute reality' whose transcendence is only another name for unknowableness, and whose stability is only another name for irrelevance to human problems. When philosophers once consent seriously to consider the difference between these two 'realities,' I am confident that Mr. Pratt will be among the first to be (re)converted to Pragmatism.

V

WILLIAM JAMES AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

[*Mind*, April 1913]

As a philosopher, William James was singularly fortunate in the matter of education. He was brought up in close familiarity with the concrete sciences of physiology, biology and medicine, and under the eye of a naturalist of genius, Agassiz. And like Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Hill, Spencer, to mention only English writers, he was never taught any philosophy academically. He sometimes said that the first philosophical lectures at which he was present were those he was himself called upon to give as a professor at Harvard. As seems only natural in the son of a Swedenborgian writer, and in the brother of Henry James, the novelist, he was clearly impelled by his personal bent to the study of life and mind. After what was perhaps not altogether a false start as an artist, he began the approach to his manifest destiny through the portals of the Medical School at Harvard. With Harvard he remained identified until his retirement in 1907—up to within three years, that is, of his death on the 26th August, 1910, at the age of sixty-eight. As a student of medicine he was naturally drawn to physiology. As a physiologist his interest

centred in the functioning of the brain and nervous system; and he was thus brought face to face with the biological fact that the brain is not merely an organ for the registration of sensations, nor even for 'disinterested' intellectual construction, but is, quite specifically, an organ of reaction upon stimulation, *i.e.* an instrument of action. His dissatisfaction, on the other hand, with the vagueness and inconsistency of the materialistic theorising in regard to that fact, drove him to a closer study of the nature of experience as seen from within. And so he woke one day to find himself a devoted student of the human mind, with that freshness and lucidity of vision which comes alone to the man who is permitted to follow his soul's affinities whithersoever they lead him, and is not wearied and staled by having to wade through a traditional syllabus carefully adjusted to the interest of examiners.

The demon of logical *Folgerichtigkeit*, backed by superficial appearances, will here insist on noting that from psychology James was led on to philosophy. But it would be truer to say that he remained a psychologist at heart, and that it was precisely his psychologic insight that enabled him to discern the personal sources of the big philosophical antitheses. James's fidelity, therefore, to what may *sub specie æternitatis* be reputed so trivial a thing as the human soul and its destinies, need not necessarily be construed as a philosophical limitation. It can, in fact, be so construed only if the distinction between psychology on the one hand, and logic and metaphysics on the

other, be taken so absolutely as is the fashion more especially with 'idealistic' writers. But what has strangely escaped the notice of such writers is, that the assertion of this distinction as irreducible and absolute is really a *confession*—a confession, namely, of total inability to establish any intelligible relation whatsoever between the Absolute and the human individual. It would not be correct to say that the distinction, so taken, is responsible for the absolutist fiasco—it is that fiasco.¹ For here, at least, it is true that there is nothing in the end but what was in the beginning.

James himself does not argue this question dialectically—such was not his way. But the *Principles of Psychology* show on every page how, for the psychologist, the abstract distinction between psychology and philosophy begins to fade in the light of concrete investigation; while the incidental criticisms of current philosophical

¹ This has been, in principle, more fully shown in my articles on "Green's Refutation of Empiricism" in *Mind*, January 1900, N S, No 33, and on "Pragmatism—the Evolution of Truth" in the *Quarterly Review*, April 1909, No 419. In Green's case the fiasco takes the shape of asserting the impossibility of 'comprehending in a single conception' what are nevertheless pontifically declared to be two 'aspects' of one and the same consciousness. But in every defence of Absolute Idealism the final *impasse* is essentially the same. And in every case the *impasse* is simply the final bringing to confused consciousness of a diremption inherent in the 'philosophy of identity' from the beginning. There are, however, several possible ways of developing Absolute Idealism, which would place it beyond the reach of this criticism, and which should offer no special difficulty to anyone who has received a sound Hegelian education. Why not explain, for instance, that things which have nothing else in common must of necessity share the identical difference which appears to divide them, that the greater the diversity, the more *fundamental* must be the underlying unity, that Absolute Difference is therefore the supreme type of Identity, and that thus the profounder meaning of the Law of Identity is, that A is never so truly itself as when it wears the outward form of some other letter of the alphabet?

doctrines perpetually suggest that for the metaphysician the only choice is between good psychology and bad psychology. Of especial importance in this connexion is James's exposure of the dependence of Kantism, whether in its original form or in its English versions, on the psychological atomism of Hume.¹ And even where, as in the Objective Idealism of Green, the psychology has gone so very bad as to be hardly recognisable as such, we are made to feel, as we read James's good-tempered criticism,² that it is just the remnant of subjectivism, which such pathetic efforts are made to eliminate, that enables the 'system,' however perversely, to retain a spectral after-glow of meaning. It is just this, we perceive, that allows us to regard the meaning as logically confused instead of as psychologically non-existent—as in moments of exasperation one is tempted to declare

The *Principles of Psychology*, then, are of profound philosophical importance, if only because the perusal thereof raises doubts as to the super-human origin and eternal validity of the traditional borders and inveterate antagonisms between the various philosophical disciples. James, being more interested in discovery than in definition, was not to be deterred from pursuing various vital questions simply because they were ruled out *a priori* by such formal and arbitrary distinctions as those between logic and psychology, or between logic and ethics.

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, I pp 360-370

² *Op. cit* I pp 366-370, and II pp 9-11

It is precisely on the border-line between reputedly different sciences that the most interesting and fruitful discoveries are to be made. And the philosophic sciences, more than any others, were sorely in need of cross-fertilisation to renew their vitality. These particular distinctions can claim no special exemption from the supreme law that distinctions can retain logical significance only by proving their utility in concrete inquiry. This general principle knocks the bottom out of Formal Logic *überhaupt*, as completely as the particular application here suggested knocks the bottom out of Absolutism. And that is why Absolutism is, in its true inwardness, not Formal Logic gone mad, but Formal Logic with its madness made plain.

But over and above this general significance of the *Principles*, it is to be noted that all James's later writings simply enforce the underlying philosophy, and expand the overt teaching, of that great work—though with a curious lack of express references. To show in detail how James's philosophy is foreshadowed, and in all essentials pre-formed, in the *Principles*, would lead us too far afield for the purposes of this paper. But a few detached quotations, taken from vol. i. alone,¹ may help to drive home a point which is not even yet as fully recognised as it should be.

“ The study of the phenomena of consciousness

¹ The highly important chapters on “ The Perception of Reality ” (see especially pp 291-298 and pp 311-317), “ Reasoning ” (especially pp 329-336), “ Will ” (especially pp 569-579—on Free Will), and “ Necessary Truths—Effects of Experience ” (especially pp 624-640, and pp 661-675), are all in vol. II. But I only aim here at giving samples to show the general perspective of the book.

which we shall make throughout the rest of this book will show us that consciousness is at all times primarily a *selecting agency* " (p 139) ¹

" The moment you bring a consciousness into the midst, survival ceases to be a mere hypothesis. No longer is it ' *if* survival is to occur, then so and so must brain and other organs work ' It has now become an imperative decree ' Survival shall occur, and therefore organs *must* so work.' *Real* ends appear for the first time now upon the world's stage The conception of consciousness as a purely cognitive form of being, which is the pet way of regarding it in many idealistic schools, modern as well as ancient, is thoroughly anti-psychological, as the remainder of this book will show. Every actually existing consciousness seems to itself at any rate to be a *fighter for ends*, of which many, but for its presence, would not be ends at all Its powers of cognition are mainly subservient to these ends, discerning which facts further them and which do not " (p 141)

Speaking of the Soul : " The fact is that one cannot afford to despise any of these great traditional objects of belief. Whether we realise it or not there is always a great drift of reasons, positive and negative, towing us in their directions " (p 181). [This is all the more striking in that it occurs in an argument *against* positing a ' substantial ' Soul, for psychological purposes.]

" The mind, in short, works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone In a sense the statue stood there

¹ Italics as in the original, throughout

from eternity But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest. . . The world *we* feel and live in will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, like sculptors, by simply rejecting certain portions of the given stuff . . . My world is but one in a million alike embedded, alike real to those who may abstract them " (pp 288-289).

" The reason why we *do* pray . . . is simply that we cannot *help* praying. . . . The impulse to pray is a necessary consequence of the fact that whilst the innermost of the empirical selves of a man is a Self of the *social* sort, it yet can find its only adequate *Socius* in an ideal world " (p 316).

" When we reflect that the turnings of our attention form the nucleus of our inner self ; when we see (as in the chapter on the Will we shall see) that volition is nothing but attention ; when we believe that our autonomy in the midst of nature depends on our not being pure effect, but a cause . . . we must admit that the question whether attention involve such a principle of spiritual activity or not is metaphysical as well as psychological, and is well worthy of all the pains we can bestow on its solution. It is in fact the pivotal question of metaphysics, the very hinge on which our picture of the world shall swing from materialism, fatalism, monism, towards spiritualism, freedom, pluralism—or else the other way." (pp. 447-448).

" The whole feeling of reality, the whole sting

and excitement of our voluntary life, depends on our sense that in it things are *really being decided* from one moment to another, and that it is not the dull rattling off of a chain that was forged innumerable ages ago. This appearance, which makes life and history tingle with such a tragic zest, *may* not be an illusion. As we grant to the advocate of the mechanical theory that it may be one, so he must grant to us that it *may not*. And the result is two conceptions of possibility face to face with no facts definitely enough known to stand as arbiter between them. . . . For the sake of that [mechanical] theory we make inductions from phenomena to others that are startlingly *unlike* them ; and we assume that a complication which Nature has introduced (the presence of feeling and of effort, namely) is not worthy of scientific recognition at all. Such conduct may conceivably be *wise*, though I doubt it ; but scientific, as contrasted with metaphysical, it cannot seriously be called " (pp. 453-454).

" All that a state of mind need do, in order to take cognizance of a reality, intend it, or be ' about ' it, is to lead to a remoter state of mind which either acts upon the reality or resembles it. The only class of thoughts which can with any show of plausibility be said to resemble their objects are sensations " (p 471).

" Why from Plato and Aristotle downwards, philosophers should have vied with each other in scorn of the knowledge of the particular, and in adoration of that of the general, is hard to understand, seeing that . . . the *things* of worth are all

concretes and singulars. The only value of universal characters is that they help us, by reasoning, to know new truths about individual things" (pp 479-480)

"The ideal working of the law of compound association, were it unmodified by any extraneous influence, would be such as to keep the mind in a perpetual treadmill of concrete reminiscences from which no detail could be omitted. . . . Let us call this process *impartial redintegration*. Whether it ever occurs in an absolutely complete form is doubtful. We all immediately recognise, however, that in some minds there is a much greater tendency than in others for the flow of thought to take this form. Those insufferably garrulous old women, those dry and fanciless beings who spare you no detail, however petty, of the facts they are recounting, and upon the thread of whose narrative all the irrelevant items cluster as pertinaciously as the essential ones, the slaves of literal fact, the stumblers over the smallest abrupt step in thought, are figures known to all of us . . . *In no revival of a past experience are all the items of our thought equally operative in determining what the next thought shall be. Always some ingredient is prepotent over the rest . . . In subjective terms we say that the prepotent items are those which appeal most to our Interest*" (pp. 569-572).

Surely it should not have been difficult to recognise that the author of such a book as the *Principles* was no 'mere psychologist,' with a happy knack of writing, but a man of original and

fructuous philosophical ideas ? Surely it should at least have been obvious that a new *logical* principle—that of purpose, selection, *relevance*—had arisen to challenge the age-long supremacy of the Principle of Totality ? And did not this new principle clearly hold the promise, or threat, of a new kind of philosophic synthesis which, by breaking down the abstract distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective,' should at last bring together what all previous so-called syntheses had thrust apart, namely, Man and Reality ? But no. So firm a hold had the conventional scheme of classification, separating once and for all psychology from logic and metaphysics, on the trained philosophical mind in this country, that the philosophical significance of the *Principles of Psychology* seems at first to have been successfully hidden by the mere title of the book. Although all the foundations of James's pragmatism were laid, and all its methods were illustrated, in his *Psychology*, no one (with the exception of Dewey and a few others) looked to it for philosophic instruction. The philosophic world slumbered behind the ramparts of a 'system' within which Appearance was the sole portion of man, while Reality was reserved to the Absolute ; nor dreamed that a foe could approach save by the familiar ways. Hence James's later and more avowedly philosophical treatises crashed into the established dogmas with the disastrous suddenness of bombs hurled from an invading airship. Even now old-fashioned intellectualists find it hard to understand that they have been witness-

ing, not sporadic signs and wonders which betoken that the Absolute is wroth with its people, but the beginning of a new philosophic era.

Perhaps the most refreshing thing in James's philosophy is his view as to what philosophy itself really is and means. His *Pragmatism* characteristically opens with a quotation from Mr. Chesterton, which declares that "the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe . . . We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether in the long run anything else affects them." And James endorses his paradox with the explanation: "The philosophy which is so important in each of us is not a technical matter; it is our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means. It is only partly got from books; it is our individual way of just seeing and feeling the total push and pressure of the cosmos."

These words constitute a philosophic Declaration of Independence and a truly Jacobin vindication of the Rights of Man; but they challenge the conception of philosophy held most sacred by the vast majority of professional philosophers, who would deem their subject degraded by any condescension to the human *motif*. These instructors of youth may, to be sure, speak in somewhat uncertain tones of the position to be assigned to Ethics; but in Logic and Metaphysics they hold, with lofty dignity and great positiveness, that our aim is purely impersonal and 'objective,' and has nothing to do with personal vision or even with

the 'practical make-shifts' of human science. It is because James made this innovation of refusing to treat philosophy as an idle pastime, or as 'intellectual gymnastics,' and demanded instead that some rational connexion should be made out between the 'theories' propounded by professional philosophers in the lecture-room and the beliefs that human beings actually live by in the larger world outside, that he has so scandalised the one class and so interested the other.

But this novel view of the scope of philosophy entails, and reflects, a correspondingly radical change of attitude towards the facts of psychology—a change of attitude more important than any improvement in specific doctrines. James broke entirely new ground by refusing to accept the preliminary dilemma, that to *understand* the life of the spirit is to reduce it either to a system of intellectual categories or to a set of mechanical principles. He prefers not to reduce it to alien terms at all. He has the temerity to accept conscious life at its own valuation—a *tertium quid* which enlightened psychologists and philosophers had deemed unworthy of serious recognition, and which the amicable division of intellectual spoils between psychology and philosophy is cleverly designed to suppress. It was a standpoint contemptuously abandoned to the novelist, the religious preacher, and the man of affairs. But James's disconcertingly non-euclidean mind boldly challenged the intellectualist axiom, that the parallel lines of knowing and doing must never meet. What makes his *Principles of Psychology*

as valuable a handbook of Ethics as it is of Logic, is that he seems to have grasped from the first intuitively ¹ what he subsequently more explicitly urged, that this dualism, immanent both in transcendental monism and in Humian empiricism, this fatal cleft between man as knower and man as doer, must lead as surely to intellectual, as to moral, disaster. In a world where human feeling and will have no place save as an unsubstantial iridescent film, human knowledge, too, can aim at nothing more significant than at masking the reality within. This is the remarkably simple explanation of the apparent paradox, that consistent devotion to the ideal of 'purely theoretic' truth finally conducts to utter scepticism.

True it is, that this admission of human *values* as pervasive of reality completely transforms the world of 'fact.' For the 'values' enter into the 'facts' and quietly possess them, and no exorcisms of the most transcendental terminology can eject them. But the transformation is a return to human nature. It is the letting in of the familiar light of day, to lighten the dark places where our feet are set. Surely it compares favourably with that invisible transformation of 'fact' which the Absolute is supposed, for its own supra-conscious enlightenment or amusement, to effect behind our backs. Does it not savour both of disingenuousness and defect of ingenuity, that idealist critics of James should have thought of nothing better than

¹ Cf. e.g., *op cit* ii p 321 "Will and Belief, in short, meaning a certain relation between objects and the Self, are two names for one and the same *psychological* phenomenon. All the questions which arise concerning one are questions which arise concerning the other "

to rake out the discarded notion of 'hard fact' from the obscure rubbish-heap to which they themselves had relegated it, and should seek to use it as a stick to beat off the humanist attack withal? The only plausible explanation would seem to be that they knew not what they did because they knew not what they meant

And as with 'fact,' so with 'intellectual satisfaction,' which Mr. Bradley and Mr. Joachim have so elaborately shown is the very thing Intellectualism is powerless to yield. The chief burden of our complaint against Intellectualism, as represented by such writers as these, is the failure to give any coherent account of what is *meant* by 'intellectual satisfaction.' For they seem to hold (a) that Truth is for us that which satisfies our intellect; (b) that Reality, as such, is nevertheless indifferent to any satisfaction we as individuals may feel; (c) that these two propositions are mutually explanatory, and indeed identical

This ghostly bogey, then, of 'pure intellectual satisfaction,' which turns out to be as brainless as it is obviously and designedly bloodless, need no longer deter us from that other way of epistemological advance which James took in *The Will to Believe*. He pointed out that our emotional nature does in fact function as a guide to, and constituent of, what we hail as a 'truth,' and that, with the proper precautions, it need not always lead us into error. For as physical science long ago found out when, after long wanderings in the desert of *a priori* dogmatism, it accepted the risks involved in the 'deceitfulness of the senses,' and

persevered in the path of experiment, only what leads us nowhere will never lead us astray. James, in fact, saw that the right to experiment is no monopoly of natural science—that the field of experiment is co-extensive with conscious life. Experience is experimentation; and so James proposes to extend to truth *uberhaupt* the rights (and risks) of scientific truth

From the first some have perversely interpreted this as meaning that whatever belief any one may choose to adopt is forthwith established as absolutely true. James had from the outset made clear the distinction between the (psychological) will to believe which he described, and the logical right to believe which he based on it, by emphasising the need of choosing a 'live hypothesis' and of running the risk of error¹. In other words, *verification* was the hall-mark of truth. But even his constant protests, that a belief in order to be true must work, did not avail to eradicate the 'impression' that when he said 'work,' he *must* mean 'feel pleasant.'

This queer misrepresentation instructively illustrates both the aloofness of the 'philosophic' mind from the spirit of scientific investigation, and the obduracy of the intellectualist prejudices which James sought to dispel. It betrays the philosophical *idée fixe* that as the only kind of truth worth considering is absolute truth, so every new theory of truth must needs devise some new infallible self-acting snare in the shape of an 'absolute criterion' for the capture of that shy

¹ *The Will to Believe*, p. 29

legendary fowl. But not only was James thus accused of widening the conception of truth, in the interests of religious dogma, till it lost all meaning, he was also accused of narrowing it till it was reduced to the trade mark of worldly success—an interpretation which at least had the grace to allow that experimental testing and the distinction between success and failure were essential to his theory. These two interpretations have not even been unfailingly discriminated, but they are so incongruous both with James's text as a whole and with each other that they may safely be left by the roadside to their mutual destruction.

Others, again, have imagined that James's theory of the intimate correlation between 'theoretic' and 'practical' truth is scepticism naked and unashamed. To which the answer is that whether 'scepticism' is to be taken as a term of reproach or commendation, depends on whether it teaches lessons of despair or of hope, of intellectual death or of intellectual life. Now there is just one form of scepticism which is in the strictest sense deadly. It is that which professes to define truth in the abstract, but adds that God or the Absolute alone can know what, in the concrete, is actually true. It claims to know just so much of the 'nature of truth' as is necessary to convince us that truth itself lies for ever beyond the grasp of man. That kind of scepticism, as Mr. Bradley has himself made plain, is the outcome of idealist metaphysic. And that is the kind of scepticism from which a humanist view of the nature of truth delivers us.

And so we resume our peaceful inquiry into what James himself really did mean. As we have noted, in place of the futile, elusive conception of truth as purely 'objective' and 'absolute,' he proposes to adopt and generalise the scientific view of truth as that which stands the test of experience.¹ But verification is never even in its simplest form a matter of mere passive receptivity; and it can never be final or 'absolute,' though for practical purposes it may be complete. Always it is a question of the comparative success or failure of our endeavour to manipulate the *data* of experience in the interests of our vital necessities—necessities more imperious than any 'purely logical' necessity. The latter can only retain a footing as the servant, and not as the master, of the former. This manipulation (or 'mutilation,' as absolutist logic will have it) begins, indeed, with the breaking up of the continuous *datum* of experience into more or less distinguishable *data*. 'Pure sensation' and 'bare fact' are nothing but barefaced methodological fictions—of very dubious utility.²

But having once repudiated that *absolute* distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective,' which is the sure road to philosophical damnation—having once admitted a 'subjective' (*i.e.* human) element into the heart of truth—having

¹ Cf. *op. cit.* II pp. 635-638 and 665-669. "'Scientific' conceptions," he says (p. 636), "must prove their worth by being 'verified.' This test, however, is the cause of their *preservation*, not that of their production."

² *Principles of Psychology*, I p. 224, II pp. 3-9 ("The Cognitive Function of Sensation")

once gone so far, James will not limit that element to matters of mere bodily moment. We are not as the beasts that perish · perhaps the beasts themselves are not that. James invites us to treat our moral and religious aspirations as methodologically on a par with scientific categories; as hypotheses, that is, concerning the possibilities of moulding the future, to be verified by their working. Of course, if we have *no* spiritual needs and aspirations, *cadit quæstio*. There will then be no ventures of thought to verify James does not pretend to force the moral or religious life on us by logical compulsion, any more than he proposes to argue us into the satisfaction of our bodily needs, or to compel us to desire scientific knowledge. What he does say is that, as the will to live is the mainspring of all real knowledge, so the *kind* of life we will to live must determine our 'theory of the cosmos.'¹ In other words, a theory of the cosmos has no real meaning unless it is *also* a way of life. Faith without works is not even faith. And the faith to which he vindicates our right, is not to be

¹ Cf *Principles of Psychology*, II pp 296-298 "The *fons et origo* of all reality, whether from the absolute or the practical point of view, is thus subjective, is ourselves As bare logical thinkers, without emotional reaction, we give reality to whatever objects we think of, for they are really phenomena, or objects of our passing thought, if nothing more But, as thinkers with emotional reaction, we give what seems to us a still higher degree of reality to whatever things we select and emphasize and turn to *with a will* The world of living realities as contrasted with unrealities is thus anchored in the Ego, considered as an active and emotional term Whatever things have intimate and continuous connection with my life are things of whose reality I cannot doubt Whatever things fail to establish this connection are things which are practically no better for me than if they existed not at all" (In the original, the greater part of the foregoing is italicised)

expressed as the negation of Doubt, but as the Courage which is willing to face real risks. Not the least of James's merits as ethical teacher is to have made the primary virtue of courage the foundation of man's whole life, both moral and intellectual.

The foregoing brief commentary on what James himself seems to have regarded as the most important aspect of his philosophy is not intended—it need hardly be said—to place that philosophy beyond dispute, but rather to indicate how closely allied it is to common sense and how sharply and directly it runs counter to a host of indurated philosophical conceptions. This seems a reasonable course to pursue, as contemporary criticism still apparently oscillates between treating these views as too paradoxical for detailed consideration, and as too 'purely psychological' and commonplace to be of any philosophical importance. I have tried to show that neither of these two extremes is logically justifiable.

Nothing has been said directly of James's views on the continuity of consciousness, on the nature of will, on pluralism, on immortality—the list of omissions might be extended indefinitely. I have tried to concentrate attention on the essential novelty of his general attitude to the 'problems of philosophy'—namely, his perception that philosophy in general has no meaning save as an effort to bring unity into the life of man as it appears to the man himself. The achievement of such unity was the only ideal of consistency that he thought worth aiming at; and fidelity to that

aim the only kind of working consistency that a philosopher has any right to be proud of. After all, James might well be content to rest his title to fame on his having translated the question 'What makes knowledge possible ?' into the question 'What makes knowledge credible, and conduct possible ?' That is what in the history of philosophy will be known as James's Answer to Kant ; and there are those who believe that it will rank as more epoch-making than Kant's irrelevant Answer to Hume. In a word, to James belongs the glory of having first divined the Secret of the Plain Man, and ministered to his desire for a knowledge that is relevant to action and to life.

VI

HAS GREEN ANSWERED LOCKE ?

[*Mind*, July 1914]

I WISH in this paper to bring forward certain considerations supplementary to those set forth in my article on Green's *Refutation of Empiricism* in *Mind*, January 1900 (N.S. , 33). But first I must briefly explain why I still regard the subject as important. The subject has more than historical importance, because Green, half-unconsciously, has brought to light, better than any other rationalist, the nature of the fundamental divergence between Empiricism and Rationalism. And though his criticism of Empiricism is no longer openly and confidently appealed to as furnishing a conclusive and final refutation thereof, rationalists have not so far been able to produce anything more convincing in the way of an answer to Hume or even an answer to Locke.

I

What Rationalism stands for is the conception of Knowledge as an ideally complete system—*i.e.* as completely systematic and absolutely all-inclusive. Absolute or Objective Idealism, as a special form of rationalism, simply consists in pointing out that the realisation of this ideal is,

or would be, indistinguishable from Reality itself. This result it calls the 'identification' of Knowledge and Reality.

But, as Green was the first openly to acknowledge, this Knowledge that is 'identical' with Reality is not and never can be simply identical with *human* knowledge. On the other hand, the identification between Knowledge *simpliciter* and Reality is, in Objective Idealism, so complete, that anything which is *not* identical with Reality ceases to deserve the name of Knowledge. Thus, from the point of view of absolute knowledge, human knowledge simply *is not* knowledge at all; while from the point of view of human knowledge, absolute knowledge simply is not knowable at all. The result of claiming that really to know is to know and be *everything*, is that we are forced to admit that we human beings *really know* nothing. That is how Rationalism proposes to vanquish Scepticism. But is it not rather to swallow Scepticism whole, and to identify oneself with it? But for the difference in name between Absolute Idealism which says it is going to reveal absolute truth, and Absolute Scepticism which says there is no truth at all to be revealed, no one would have suspected that the two doctrines were different.

It is not, however, so much the essentially sceptical nature of Rationalism that I here wish to insist on, as the idealists' admission that their 'Knowledge' in its essential nature is very literally *not ours*. The ideals of Idealism, therefore, whatever aesthetic gratifications they may yield to certain minds, are not very helpful to one

who is in earnest with the problems of human knowledge.

What now does *Empiricism* stand for? It stands precisely for a consideration of the relation between Reality and *human* knowledge. That is to say, the problem it *starts with* is the problem which Idealism first ignores and finally despairs of. Its immediate concern being with the knowledge we seem to ourselves to have, and not with a hypothetical knowledge posited as ideally complete, its quest is from the first a quest for the means of detecting error and of *improving* what knowledge we have. As a simple matter of history, this has always been the leading *motif* of Empiricism, which therefore from the outset is of an essentially practical nature. In insisting that we learn by experience, Empiricism, unlike Idealism, leaves room for the correction of our theories by means of *further* experience. Thus the empiricist dislike of dogmatism is, in its positive aspect, the belief in the *progressiveness* of human knowledge. Nowhere are these human motives of Empiricism more obvious than in Locke; and that is one reason why I have chosen the present title for this paper.

Now Locke the protagonist of real religious toleration and of intellectual freedom in general, Locke the sworn foe of meaningless phrases and unreasoned assumptions,¹ never appears in Green's pages at all. The only Locke that is there allowed to show his face for the sake of getting a

¹ Cf. Campbell Fraser's *Locke* (in "Phil. Classics for English Readers"), chaps. II, III.

slap in it, is a pure intellectualist with a particular, and no doubt very faulty, theory of the nature, development and limitations of the human understanding. In other words, Green ignores Locke's humanism and practical aims, and confines himself to criticising his efforts towards providing a *rational basis* for the refusal to dogmatise and to persecute.

But even on this narrow ground Green's attack on Locke is one long *ignoratio elenchi*. Whereas Locke was trying to understand the nature of the human understanding and the way it grew up, it never seems to have occurred to Green that the *human* understanding was a subject worthy of human study and was in fact the title of Locke's study. Instead of starting with Locke's problems, he starts by maintaining that consciousness is inherently timeless, and then discovers that therefore it cannot conceivably be subject to change or improvement. Now this at once rules out the *human* consciousness with its progressive changes; and in the end Green himself seems to perceive this. For he not only admits, but even prides himself on the fact that the consciousness which he has been investigating is absolutely different from the human consciousness of Locke's inquiry. Consciousness *sub specie æternitatis* and consciousness *sub specie temporis* cannot, he expressly contends, "be comprehended in a single conception."¹ But does not the fact that Green thus avowedly leaves it an open question *how* the Eternal Consciousness is related and relevant to

¹ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 73

the human, avow the irrelevance of his own conclusion to the position he professes to have refuted?

II

Strictly speaking then, our question, "Has Green answered Locke?" is emphatically answered in the negative by Green himself. Now, when a man hurls his own lucubrations into the waste-paper basket in this way, it does at first sight seem hardly worth while to pick them out and subject them to minute criticism. Nevertheless in the present state of philosophy this is precisely what we are compelled to do. For the Cimmerian darkness, in which Green's philosophy ends, still does duty in idealistic writings for philosophic enlightenment. Modern Idealism still professes to refute modern Empiricism by maintaining that the objects of their several inquiries are absolutely distinct. The 'system' of Idealism can never rid itself of this confusion, for the confusion is the system.

And just because the confusion comes so clearly to light in Green, Green is really less confused than his successors. If he himself has nothing definite to say, he has at least the merit of enabling us to lay our finger definitely on the source of the confusion. The fundamental divergence in technical doctrine between Empiricism and Idealism takes place as Green's example unmistakably shows, on the question of *the relation of thought to time*. Empiricism, which is frankly concerned with human thought and human problems, quite simply takes

thought as essentially progressive and therefore as being in time. Idealism on the other hand takes thought as essentially 'timeless'; and only when pressed admits that this applies exclusively to that impersonal mind—if mind it can be called—to which it gives the name of the Absolute.

Now, as a condition of maintaining their intellectual existence, and of persuading people that philosophy is a fit subject for human study and for economic encouragement, idealists obviously must resist the only natural conclusion from their fundamental premises—namely, that the conception of the Absolute is entirely otiose *for the purposes of human knowledge*. Here, then, is where the mind of the idealist gets its chance of displaying its superior subtlety.

The idealist's public profession of faith is. Reality is rational: it is such that it does not contradict itself. But the secret formula for the compounding of idealistic doctrine is this: The absolute difference of A from B in no wise derogates from the essential identity of B with A. The absolute difference is simply the form in which the essential identity manifests itself *to us* under the peculiar limitations of the human intelligence. The immediate application of this convenient formula for the higher synthesis of all contradictions is as follows.

It is *only from the human point of view* that the two alternatives of timelessness and progressiveness really are exclusive, and really appertain to two different kinds of consciousness. Once we have made the distinction between the absolute

and the human 'points of view,' we must allow that distinctions which hold good *for us* need not hold good for the Absolute. And this very distinction between ourselves and the Absolute is a case in point. It possesses 'relative truth,' but not Absolute Truth. For the time-process itself is just what constitutes the timeless content of the Absolute Experience. What we feel as effort and incompleteness on this stage of time, the Absolute effortlessly enjoys as one grand harmonious chord from the stalls of Eternity. *We* indeed cannot without alcohol's, or harmless anæsthetic's artful aid see things at once *sub specie temporis* and *sub specie æternitatis*¹ But what in the normal human mind is self-contradiction, in the Absolute is 'transmuted,' if not exactly into Truth, into something far more resplendent.

At this stage of the proceedings we begin to get some interesting admissions. It is admitted that absolute truth is not only too good for us but is also not good enough for the Absolute Intellect, which Idealism professed to satisfy, turns out to be the one thing that stands in the way of complete intellectual satisfaction. The Absolute can do a great deal, but, as idealists admit, even through the mouth of its chosen prophets it cannot declare the glory of its final product, nor reveal the secret processes of its transcendental metabolism. It can do everything but make itself intelligible, for just as 'to be obvious is to be inartistic,' so to be intelligible is to fall below the level of Absolute

¹ Cf William James's *Will to Believe*, pp 294-298 (Note on a pamphlet entitled, *The Anæsthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy*, by B P Blood)

Reality When, therefore, we have learned to exchange the ambitions of the intellect for the thrills of mystic awe, we admittedly have learnt everything that an intellectualist philosophy really has to teach.

The Theory of Truth as Absolute Coherence is another name given to this philosophic effort, not by some irresponsible humorist, but by idealists themselves. And really, when once we get fairly started with a radical contrast, which is at the same time an ultimate identity, between the truth or super-truth of the Absolute and what is only true 'from the point of view of the human intelligence'—when once we sympathetically catch the spirit of this great Hegelian Idea, there is no reason why we should stop anywhere or stick at anything. Of the making of books on these lines there need never be any end; and thus the timeless perfection of knowledge is reconciled with the human need for the continual production of literature. Our Hegelian education is completed by the recognition that our very limitations are really a charter of complete intellectual freedom. For now we can talk any inspired nonsense we choose, and lay the blame for its *apparent* incoherence on the limitations inherent in the 'standpoint of the human intelligence.'

In the foregoing I have tried to bring out quite objectively the general nature of the issue between humanistic Empiricism and rationalistic Idealism. As for the epistemology of *modern* Humanism, it is primarily a revolt against the peculiar lengths to which the doctrine of the Relativity of Human

Knowledge has been carried by Absolutism. In opposition to the principle of relativity as so understood—*i.e.* as depriving human knowledge of its character as knowledge precisely because it is human—Humanism holds fast to the *progressiveness and human relevance of knowledge*. And first and foremost, as regards technical doctrine, it joins issue with Absolutism on the question whether real progress in knowledge is possible.

The thought which is completely out of time is already rather out of date ; but it still possesses sufficient vitality to obstruct efficient thinking. In what follows, therefore, I propose to investigate more minutely the nature and origin of the idealistic fallacy in regard to the relation between change and consciousness. In my former article it was shown that what Green calls the 'timelessness' or 'eternity' of thought—which in any case is a purely formal character, appropriate to error equally with truth—is a misinterpretation of (a) the indivisibility of the judgment and (b) the continuity of consciousness¹. But at that time I was unable to explain how Green came to regard an absolute difference between change and consciousness as a satisfactory logical basis for the 'identification' of thought and reality. In fact, the avowed object of that article was to elicit an authoritative explanation of what this 'identity' that idealists speak of really *means*. In this respect the article in question has been, I must sorrowfully admit, a signal failure. But I think I can now throw some feeble light on this difficult

¹ *Mind* (N.S.), No. 33, pp. 72-74.

question. In the course of our inquiry we shall see that while modern Empiricism *rectifies* Locke and Hume in regard to the relation between change and consciousness, idealists from Kant onwards have separated the true from the false in these writers and held fast to the false.

III

The gravamen of Green's criticism of Locke, Hume, and the older empiricists generally, is that, in reducing experience to a succession of mutually exclusive 'states of consciousness,' they have failed to explain how consciousness of the *succession* should ever arise. So far he is perfectly right: you cannot get the *experience* of change out of 'a mere series of related events.' Green, however, unhesitatingly assumes that this is exactly equivalent to saying that "there is an absolute difference between change and the intelligent consciousness or knowledge of change, which precludes us from tracing any development of the one into the other"¹. Whereas all we need admit is this: that 'a mere series of related events'² *means* 'a transition from A to B in which the transition itself is not experienced.' I propose to show, in the first place, that the above assumption, which deserves to be called *par excellence* Green's Fallacy, destroys not merely Empiricism,

¹ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 88

² I abstain from pressing the point that in representing "a mere series of related events" (see *e.g.*, *op. cit.* p. 20) as absolutely different from "the consciousness of the series as related," Green, for his part, admits that relations do *not* necessarily owe their existence to conceptual synthesis

but experience as a process; and not merely the historical treatment of thought, but the historical method as such. No subtle reasoning is needed to establish this result. it stares us in the face.

For what is the *modus operandi* of that 'spiritual principle' by means of which Green thought at once to explain the 'possibility of experience,' and to silence empiricism for ever? Green's theory is that a consciousness of a successive series is only possible in virtue of a 'timeless' principle of unity which by its relating activity holds together the successive moments, and *in so doing neutralises and in fact destroys their successive character*. In other words, Green's 'spiritual principle,'—which is Kant's synthetic unity of apperception in a theological dress—has for its sole function to overcome time and to negate change.

Green is as explicit on this point as it is possible to be. "The objects," he says, "between which a relation subsists, even a relation of succession, are, just so far as related, not successive"¹. And indeed, since Green holds that thought and its object are 'identical,'² while at the same time he regards thought as essentially 'timeless,'³ he is logically compelled to conclude both that 'thought' is unprogressive and that whatever object is thought of must be timeless too.

So much seems, by comparison, quite clear and

¹ *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 34. Of course idealists will say that Green cannot really have meant what he said. To which the only possible answer is, Did he really mean anything? I have tried, in the text, to credit him with a sort of meaning, but I admit that this is a difficult and risky proceeding, and I may have been over-sanguine.

² Cf. *e.g.*, *op. cit.* § 58.

³ Cf. *op. cit.* § 57.

simple. Thought cannot really have a history, for history is really unthinkable. And the more closely we consider the involved arguments by which this conclusion is reached, the more impossible it seems to get any meaning out of them except on the same terms. For Green always begins by arguing that between 'a process of change' and 'any consciousness of change' there is no 'element of identity' or 'community.' At the same time, he is equally positive that to ensure the 'possibility of knowledge,' knowledge and real being must be identical. We cannot, he argues, be conscious *of* what is not contained in consciousness itself. If, therefore, knowledge of nature is to be possible, and if these two 'absolutely different' things, change and consciousness, are to coalesce, one of them, plainly, must part with its intrinsic character. It is, as I now perceive, the omission from his explicit argument of this obviously necessary link that makes the argument so extraordinarily difficult to follow, and that has obscured, apparently even from Green himself, the real meaning (if we can call it so) of his conclusion. Under cover of this omission, however, Green is now able quietly to *assume* that, of the two incompatibles, change must be the one to give up the ghost. In the moment of becoming an object of 'knowledge,' change becomes the exact opposite of what it really is in itself.

Green, then, has neither vindicated the reality of knowledge nor explained the reality of change. While pretending to explain change as an object

of experience, *he has really sacrificed it to the supposed need for a static 'unity.'* And since he is apparently unaware of having slain the empirical reality of change, he does not even attempt to explain either (1) how change as a thing in itself should so successfully elude the grasp of thought, or (2) how, if after all it is really an illusion, the illusion of it should arise in our minds. Thus change, whether as experience, as 'objective reality,' or as mere idea, remains in the end as unintelligible and as impossible for him as for the empiricists he so severely condemns for the like shortcomings. And, as has been already suggested, this catastrophe is the direct and inevitable result of Green's initial assumptions. A 'timeless' idea can no more generate the change-experience than can a mere series of feelings. Nor, if pure thought with its icy breath congeals the stream of consciousness, can it be the consciousness of the stream as flowing.

IV

Small wonder, then, that modern Idealism, which began its career by proclaiming that it alone made change intelligible, should have dimly felt that there was something wrong with its 'system.' Small wonder that it has turned its back on itself and has tried openly to expel change from its system, as being wholly 'unintelligible,' and as being therefore 'mere appearance.'

But now the trouble is that you *don't* get rid of change by calling it 'appearance,' or by any other opprobrious name. "*Plus ça change, plus c'est*

la même chose " is most literally true of change itself. Least of all can it change its identity by changing its name and address. The more clearly you establish the impossibility of 'understanding' change, the more sharply you emphasise its character as *immediate experience*, together with its entire independence of anything that idealists will admit as a 'rational principle'. The very completeness, then, of the failure to 'explain' change makes it impossible even to explain it away. And how, we may well ask, if the bare idea of change so conflicts with the nature of thought, is it possible even to think of it as 'appearance'?

We may reject change with our lips; but as an irreducible and inexpugnable element of experience it must continue to rule our thoughts—unless we frankly admit that what we choose to call 'pure thought' has absolutely nothing at all to do with experience. Change is, in short, the one thing from which there is no possibility of escape; for escape itself is a kind of change. "When Me they fly, I am the wings," is obviously truer of motion than it is of the Absolute. To call change 'unreal,' therefore, is to submit the meaning of the word 'unreal' to a strain which is really greater than it can bear. An 'unreality' of this peculiarly self-assertive and independent character is the most real thing that we can ever meet. All that we shall have done by calling change 'unreal' is to compel 'Unreality' to pass over into its Opposite. Thinking to get rid of change we shall only have got rid of meaning.

Thus the final result of the idealistic criticism of Locke and Hume, so far as it can be said to amount to anything at all, has been to free Empiricism from errors and irrelevancies, and so to place it on a firmer basis than before. While only too evidently unconscious of what it was really doing, this idealistic criticism has shown conclusively that you cannot intelligibly deny the reality of the change-experience, and that *you cannot get the change-experience out of anything other than itself*. In other words, it is the ultimate character of experience to be experience of change. *And it is impossible to derive the idea of change from any other source than the original experience*. The real mistake of the early empiricists lay, not in trying to derive the idea of change from experience, but in supposing that it could be derived from experience conceived as consisting of static and self-contained 'states of consciousness'—from something, that is, that could not possibly be the 'exemplar' of the idea. It was not the empirical principle, but their conception of the nature of experience that was here at fault.

And speaking generally, the spiritual re-birth of the early empiricists was not sufficiently complete. Trailing clouds of rationalistic glory they came. Their Empiricism was not, in James's phrase, sufficiently *radical*. On the one hand, they still hankered after 'logical certitude'; on the other, they did not claim for immediate experience one half its due. They did not recognise unequivocally that applicability to experience is the soul of meaning. They acquiesced in

the hard-and-fast distinction between terms and relations. They broke up the continuous and continuously growing stem of living experience into discontinuous dots, as loose and separate as words in a lexicon. These 'states of consciousness' were so purely momentary as to be practically timeless, though not of course eternal. And in each successive 'state of consciousness'—such was Hume's *reductio ad absurdum* of his predecessors—the identity of knowing and being was so complete that this purely momentary state was cognisant of nothing but itself.

But, in their eagerness to rehabilitate the 'logical certitude' that Hume had discredited in regard to 'matters of fact,' rationalists failed to see what was really wrong with Hume's philosophy. This seething mass of fallacies—which there is no reason to think Hume himself believed, though it amused him to puzzle his philosophical *confrères*—was swallowed *en bloc* by the 'Critical Philosophy.' The only important difference between Humism and Idealism is that the latter substitutes one kind of timelessness which it mis-calls 'eternity,' for another which frankly disclaims all theological associations. Otherwise the 'Eternal Consciousness' reproduces the Humian conception of a 'state of consciousness' in all its typical features. As James says, "The only service that transcendental egoism has done to psychology has been by its protests against Hume's 'bundle'-theory of mind. But this service has been ill-performed; for the Egoists themselves, let them say what they will, believe in the

bundle, and in their own system merely *tie it up*, with their special transcendental string, invented for that use alone."¹

V

The main object of this paper has been to show that, as regards the perception of change, the 'radical empiricism' of James succeeds, where rationalism fails, in furnishing an Answer to Hume which is at once relevant and complete. But in conclusion we may briefly touch on the question whether change, recognised as immediate experience, must still be regarded as 'unintelligible.'

If we assume, with the idealists, that to 'understand' anything is to bring it into harmony with the nature of 'thought' by purging it of the time-element, then indeed change itself, as we have to some extent already seen, is even more 'self-contradictory' and 'unintelligible' than idealists seem to have bargained for. For in that case change cannot even be understood without being theoretically destroyed, while if it is *really* destroyed, whether by criticism or by comprehension, a real change will then have taken place in our ideas, though nowhere else. Thus the assertion that change is strictly unthinkable and that reality therefore must be timeless, turns out to be indistinguishable from the assertion that thought *alone* is really changeable. If, however, we cannot change our minds without self-contradiction, we may as well *continue* to believe in the reality of change.

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, 1 pp 369-370

And there is an even more obvious consideration which should convince us that the attempt to apply the abstract principle of contradiction to the fact of change is literally suicidal. So to apply the principle is simply to *admit* that it conflicts with the whole of our experience which is to admit that it is experimentally disproved at every moment of our lives. At best the 'truth' of the principle can only be saved under these circumstances by the further admission that it is practically useless, and scientifically unworkable. Or we may put the matter still more simply, thus. If in any sense change is self-contradictory, *in that sense* self-contradiction must in real life cease to be a valid ground for the rejection of any belief whatsoever; if only because it then ceases to have any *discriminatory* value. Hence, to apply the principle to change automatically destroys its claim to be unconditionally 'true'. Even if we still insist that it is 'theoretically' true, we must in practice refuse to be influenced by it. And if we are 'for the law but against its enforcement,' in what sense can it still be described as a law of thought? Here, at any rate, is a clear case where a 'principle' in becoming useless becomes simply meaningless.

Thus, if change is really such as to conflict with the 'laws of thought,' it seems to be almost diabolically determined not to do the thing by halves. But the result of the conflict is very different from what the idealistic backers of 'thought' naively imagined it must necessarily be. For change *successfully* defies and tramples on these precious 'laws,' and so makes their pretence to be laws of

being look simply ridiculous. Let me say once more that what the 'self-contradictoriness' of change directly establishes, is that these 'laws' are no better than magical incantations, to which Nature, as a process of change, pays not the slightest attention; and which science accordingly would be foolish to treat otherwise than with contempt.

But it also proves something else. It proves that the sweet simplicity of Formal Logic has blinded idealists to the not unimportant difference between a reasoned truth and a *reductio ad absurdum*. The suppression of this distinction is of course the most notable and the most characteristic simplification that Formal Logic has effected in the theory of reasoning. The intrinsic absurdity of a conclusion does not affect its 'formal truth' or 'validity'; and 'validity' is all that Formal Logic takes cognisance of. Indeed, the greater the absurdity of the conclusion, the more brightly does the purity of the reasoning shine forth, undimmed by the irrelevancies of actual fact, or mere 'material truth.' Hence, though Formal Logic does not itself enable us to discriminate between fact and absurdity, nevertheless the Truly Absurd, or Genuine Nonsense, as opposed to the inartistic imitation known as mere incoherence or gibberish, is just Formal Logic in the luminous and convincing shape of concrete example.¹

¹ From the point of view of Formal Logic, the lunatic is probably the typical *ens rationale*. "The origin of the abnormal mental processes is not to be found in any disturbance of the reasoning powers *per se*, but in the material which is presented to those powers" (*The Psychology of Insanity*, by Bernard Hart, p. 128)

Now idealists and intellectualists generally have always prided themselves on 'following the argument whithersoever it may lead.' This attitude of mind has been dignified by the name of 'the disinterested Love of Truth' But it quite obviously is just the essential standpoint of Formal Logic and nothing else Very naturally, then, idealists have failed to observe that the 'self-contradictoriness' of change dishonours, not change, but the principle of contradiction; and in general have not realised that a principle may be undeniable in the abstract, *i.e.* when not in use, and yet become false or even meaningless in a particular application. In other words, the final source of the intellectualist fallacy is to be found in that ideal of 'logical coerciveness' which ignores *the testing of the premises* in the conclusion. A better example than idealistic philosophy itself affords of the errors and absurdities latent in those typically indisputable 'truths' called the 'laws of thought' it would be hard to find. But it is a deep discredit to philosophy at large that the 'laws of thought,' which Formal Logic so long ago 'discovered' and let loose on mankind, should only quite recently have been found out.¹

So much for the rationalistic ideals of 'knowledge' and 'intelligibility' But if, weary of the essential irrationality of rationalism, we turn to

¹ Mr Alfred Sidgwick was the first to point out that "the 'laws of thought,' though ideally true, are false in every case as applied to actual things" (*Distinction and the Criticism of Beliefs*, p 56) And he shows (*ibid* p 71 f) that the truth of this remark follows directly from the fact that "Nature is continuous throughout" Cf the same writer's *The Use of Words in Reasoning*, p 159 f, and Dr F C S Schiller's *Formal Logic*, chap x

the view that the proper function of intelligence is so to conceive fact as to enable us to control it, we shall have no difficulty in recognising that change, simply as such, *is already understood in the act of being experienced*. If thought and reality are anywhere interpenetrative, it is surely here. But, historically speaking, philosophy has ever sought to paint this lily white. We philosophers have foolishly tried to 'put into words' what every one knows at first hand, and what no one therefore—except of course a philosopher—requires to be *told*. It really ought to have occurred to us sooner that language was originally invented, not for the purpose of elaborating the obvious, but for that of imparting real information; and that therefore the empirical *elements* of description are none the worse for being 'ineffable'. In fact they only are ineffable, if 'ineffable' *means* 'elementary', not so, if it means 'incommunicable.' We have no words wherewith to *dissect* change, but we have a word for the thing itself, namely the word 'change'; as well as words for specific modes of change, such as *e g* growing, learning, forgetting. And the reason why we have no words wherewith to dissect change, is that the thing itself, as Bergson also has pointed out, is absolutely indecomposable. But philosophers, for the most part, when, on asking for words and yet more words, they are referred to their own experience, feel as if they had asked for bread and been given a stone. When told to use their eyes and ears they shake their heads and mutter "Mysticism!"

The most persistent fallacy in philosophy, historically considered, is one which, very significantly, has remained up to the present indesignate. It is the *Fallacy of Logomorphism*. Rationalistic philosophers, more particularly, have ever treated words as ends in themselves, and practically as things-in-themselves. They have made, not thought, but *words* the pattern of Reality. But if we once can grasp that the real, as opposed to the merely grammatical, meaning of words lies in their application, then at last language may cease to be as efficacious in concealing the reality from ourselves as it is in concealing our thoughts from others.

VII

THE LETTERS OF WILLIAM JAMES¹

[*The Hibbert Journal*, July 1921]

WHATEVER estimate the reader may perchance have already formed of William James's critical and constructive work in philosophy, he may rest assured that in these *Letters* he will find nothing but pure delight. It is not too much to say that their quality would suffice, in the absence of any other output, to ensure for the writer a literary reputation of the highest order. And even for the serious student of philosophy the exclusion from these volumes of all letters that are, in the words of the preface, "wholly technical or polemic," is perhaps not quite so regrettable as might appear at first sight. In the first place, James seems always to have felt that such philosophical truths as were intrinsically incapable of conveyance in non-technical form must also be intrinsically of but slight importance for human guidance. In the second place, the key to his philosophic theories is to be found precisely in that deep interest in human individuality which informs his correspondence

James's intellectual outlook was dominated by the conception of the individual mind as the inex-

¹ Edited by his son, Henry James, in two vols., Longmans, Green & Co., 1920

haustible fount of adventurous possibility, rather than by that residual abstraction, 'the' human mind 'in general'. His unique achievement, in fact, as a psychologist, was to provide a critical antidote for that subtle poison of naturalistic fatalism which every psychological system before him seemed by the very law of its nature doomed to distil. For psychology, modelling itself on physical science, conceived its business to be that of *discounting* individual differences by the discovery of general formulas of behaviour. Always physical science depends on the assumption, not that certain things are exactly alike, but that their individual differences may for certain purposes be *neglected*. 'Uniformity' is its watchword, as successful prediction is the measure of its truth. So far, therefore, as psychology aspires to be in this sense 'scientific,' it has abstracted *ab initio*, not only from the individuality of the individual, but also from the particularity of his particular acts. Where we ourselves, however, as conscious individuals are concerned, the strictly human interest begins precisely where 'scientific' generalisation leaves off. And, moreover, the uniformities which science 'discovers' are, from the subjective or psychological point of view, products of our own selective activity. All scientific truths are also human inventions. Thus, on the one hand, psychological study involves a revaluation of the nature of 'Universals'; and, on the other, individuality is the everlasting surd which in the end eludes the most cunning formulas that the most scientific psychology can devise.

Such, in briefest outline, is the philosophy of personality that already finds expression in James's great *Principles of Psychology*. Though it may not forthwith establish the reality of freedom, at any rate it completely outflanks all the stock arguments in favour of psychological 'necessity.' Essentially it protests against a severance of 'will' from 'intelligence,' which destroys the intelligibility of both. against the assumption that "everything not imposed upon a will-less and non-cooperant intellect must count as false"; a view which James rightly regards as "a preposterous principle which no human being follows in real life"¹ And by recognising that the impersonal standpoint of science *abstracts from* personality without disposing of it, it breaks down that hard-and-fast barrier between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' which is the final source of nihilistic scepticism

Whatever else may be said for the pluralistic philosophy which thus exalts 'the importance of the individual,' its vigorous humanism undoubtedly forms an admirable basis for human intercourse. It explains also that gift of sympathetic dissent which saved James from ever converting an opponent into an enemy. The fighting spirit that he so highly prized consorted in his own mind with the warmest welcome to every form of intellectual experiment. The world of fact seemed to him to afford that spirit ample scope; and the world of academic opinion was too full of it already. As a bit of self-

¹ *Letters*, II p 356

revelation, perhaps the most interesting letter in the collection is one written to Mrs. James in 1878 :

“I have often thought that the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says : ‘ *This is the real me !* ’ And afterwards, considering the circumstances in which the man is placed, and noting how some of them are fitted to evoke this attitude, whilst others do not call for it, an outside observer may be able to prophesy where the man may fail, where succeed, where be happy and where miserable. Now, as well as I can describe it, this characteristic attitude in me always involves an element of active tension, of holding my own, as it were, and trusting outward things to perform their part so as to make it a full harmony, but without any *guaranty* that they will. Make it a guaranty—and the attitude immediately becomes to my consciousness stagnant and stingless. Take away the guaranty, and I feel (provided I am *überhaupt* in vigorous condition) a sort of deep enthusiastic bliss, of bitter willingness to do and suffer anything, which translates itself physically by a kind of stinging pain inside my breast-bone (don't smile at this—it is to me an essential element of the whole thing !)—and which, although it is a mere mood or emotion to which I can give no form in words, authenticates itself to me as the deepest principle

of all active and theoretic determination which I possess " (1. pp. 199-200).

Though James never committed himself *totidem verbis* to any formal definition of philosophy, he seems to have regarded its proper task as that of undoing the abstraction by which science, in the narrower sense, *depersonalises* reality. For philosophy, as for religion, the question is precisely—James would surely not have banned the colloquialism—'Where do *we* come in?' Philosophy is, to use his actual words, "the reflection of man on his relations with the universe."¹ To assume, as a necessary preliminary to 'disinterested' inquiry, that human intelligence must be *functionally inert*—that the 'Whole,' of which we form part, is in no wise affected by our conscious attitude thereto—to assume this was not more repugnant to James's moral idiosyncrasy than to his critical sense. It is an attempt to apply to 'reality' *plus* ourselves a logical postulate which really has no meaning except as applied to 'reality' *minus* ourselves. Incidentally, it indicates an ambiguity inherent in all such terms as 'Whole,' 'Reality,' 'Universe,' as commonly used in philosophic disputation.

It is always assumed that it can make no logical difference whether or not the philosopher conceives himself as included in the 'Universe' or 'Whole.' But it is surely obvious that if he excludes himself in contemplating his 'universe,' the latter *ipso facto* cannot possibly be *all-inclusive*: while if he includes himself, he puts his

¹ Quoted in *Letters*, 1 p. 191.

'universe' under a logical obligation to *react*, in one way or another, to his personality; and its impersonality is thus given up in principle. It is by no means easy to think a reality to which our personal interests and beliefs really make *no* difference. If, however, reality should chance to be ultimately such as to sanction an absolute dichotomy into the thinker and his universe, then the thinker must be as independent of his universe as his universe is of him. He cannot therefore surrender his individuality to it, even if he would. Nor again can such a 'universe,' even if it is in itself a real 'whole,' be the whole of reality. For a 'universe' to which we are *strictly impartial* is, as we have seen, only a partial universe.

The conclusion emerges, then, that the 'Universe' may be *either* completely rigid and 'systematic' *or* all-inclusive and plastic; but it cannot possibly be *both* all-inclusive *and* absolutely rigid. A 'Logic,' therefore, which proceeds on the postulates (a) that because the universe is all-inclusive it must be systematic, (b) that because it is systematic it must be rigid, (c) that because it is rigid it must therefore be indifferent to human interests, would appear to be a tissue of incompatible postulates rather than an exemplar of pure rationality.

It is a mistake, therefore, to conceive James's *Will to Believe* as a revolt against logic, and as a defence of irrationalism. Its main object was to shake the complacency of those who plainly saw no *logical* difficulty in the assumption that man's proper attitude to the 'Universe' is that of a

'disinterested' spectator Writing to a dissentient friend in 1896, James says. "I still await criticism of my *Auseinandersetzung* of the *logical situation* of man's mind *gegenuber* the Universe, in respect to the risks it runs" (II. p. 50). And in 1904, in a good-humoured protest against a brother-philosopher's "duplicate of my own theses in the 'Will to Believe' essay (which should have been called by the less unlucky title the *Right to Believe*) in the guise of an *alternative and substitute* for my doctrine," he says:

"My essay hedged the licence to indulge in private over-beliefs with so many restrictions and signboards of danger, that the outlet was narrow enough It made of tolerance the essence of the situation, it defined the permissible cases; it treated the faith-attitude as a necessity for individuals, because the total 'evidence,' which only the race can draw, *has to include their experiments among its data*.¹ It tended to show only that faith could not be absolutely *vetoed*, as certain champions of 'science' (Clifford, Huxley, etc.) had claimed it ought to be" (II p. 207).

That the intellectual tolerance which James not only preached but practised was consistent with intensity of personal conviction, and even with much warmth of feeling, is well shown in a letter to a common friend concerning Santayana's *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (published in 1900).

"The great event in my life recently has been the reading of Santayana's book. Although I

¹ Italics mine

absolutely reject the platonism of it, I have literally squealed with delight at the imperturbable perfection with which the position is laid down on page after page, and grunted with delight at such a thickening-up of our Harvard atmosphere. . . . I now understand Santayana the man I never understood him before. But what a perfection of rottenness in a philosophy ! I don't think I ever knew the anti-realistic view to be propounded with so impudently superior an air. It is refreshing to see a representative of moribund Latinity rise up and administer such reproof to us barbarians in the hour of our triumph. . . . Nevertheless, how fantastic a philosophy !—as if the 'world of values' *were* independent of existence. It is only as *being*, that one thing is better than another . . . Moreover, when you come down to the facts, what do your harmonious and integral ideal systems prove to be ?—in the concrete ? Always things burst by the growing content of experience. Dramatic unities ; laws of versification ; ecclesiastical systems ; scholastic doctrines. Bah ! Give me Walt Whitman and Browning ten times over, much as the perverse ugliness of the latter at times irritates me, and intensely as I have enjoyed Santayana's attack. The barbarians are in the line of mental growth, and those who do insist that the ideal and the real are dynamically continuous are those by whom the world is to be saved. But I'm nevertheless delighted that the other view, always existing in the world, should at last have found so splendidly impertinent an expression among ourselves. I

have meant to write to Santayana; but on second thoughts, and to save myself, I will just ask you to send him this " (II. pp. 122-123).

A philosopher who postulates 'dynamic continuity' between the ideal and the real will never wholly part company with 'common-sense,' though James is very far from appealing to it as an oracle. Writing in 1903 (*æt.* 61), he says:

"I have got my mind working on the infernal old problem of mind and brain, and how to construct the world out of pure experience, and I feel foiled again and inwardly sick with the fever. But I verily believe that it is only work that makes one sick in that way that has any chance of breaking old shells and getting a step ahead. It is a sort of madness, however, when it is on you. The total result is to make me admire 'common-sense' as having done by far the biggest stroke of genius ever made in philosophy when it reduced the chaos of crude experience to order by its luminous *Denkmittel* of the stable 'thing,' and its dualism of thought and matter" (II. p. 198).

And again, writing to another friend a few days later, he says

"I am convinced that the desire to formulate truths is a virulent disease. It has contracted an alliance lately in me with a feverish personal ambition, which I never had before, and which I recognise as an unholy thing in such a connection. I actually dread to die until I have settled the Universe's hash in one more book, which shall be *epochmachend* at last, and a title of honour to my children! Childish idiot!—as if

formulas about the Universe could ruffle its majesty, and as if the common-sense world and its duties were not eternally the really real ! " (ii. p. 199).

The following, almost casual, remark is illuminating in regard to James's refusal to admit 'abstract truth' as the highest achievement of the human mind

"It strikes me that no good will ever come to Art as such from the analytic study of *Æsthetics*—harm, rather, if the abstractions could in any way be made the basis of practice. We should get stark things done on system with all the intangible personal *je ne sçais quarr* left out. The difference between the first- and second-best things in art absolutely seems to escape verbal definition—it is a matter of a hair, a shade, an inward quiver of some kind—yet what miles away in point of preciousness ! Absolutely the same verbal formula applies to the supreme success and to the thing that just misses it, and yet verbal formulas are all that your *æsthetics* will give " (ii p. 87)

The letters dealing with the Gifford Lectures on *Varieties of Religious Experience* (delivered in 1900 and 1902) will be turned to eagerly for the light that they throw on James's aims in this now famous work.

"The problem I have set myself," he says in an intimate letter, written while struggling against ill-health in the preparation of the lectures, "is a hard one. *first*, to defend (against all the prejudices of my 'class') 'experience' against 'philosophy' as being the real backbone of the

world's religious life—I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world's meaning; and, *second*, to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself most invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function. A task well-nigh impossible, I fear, and in which I shall fail, but to attempt it is *my* religious act " (ii. p. 127).

In another letter, written while the lectures were in progress, he briefly summarises his position :

"In these lectures the ground I am taking is this. The mother-sea and fountain-head of all religions lie in the mystical experiences of the individual, taking the word mystical in a very wide sense. All theologies and all ecclesiasticisms are secondary growths superimposed; and the experiences make such flexible combinations with the intellectual prepossessions of their subjects, that one may almost say that they have no proper *intellectual* deliverance of their own, but belong to a region deeper, and more vital and practical, than that which the intellect inhabits. For this they are also indestructible by intellectual arguments and criticisms "

For the immediate religious experience James proceeds to suggest the following very wide *interpretation* :

"I attach the mystical or religious consciousness to the possession of an extended subliminal

self, with a thin partition through which messages make irruption. We are thus made convincingly aware of the presence of a sphere of life larger and more powerful than our usual consciousness, with which the latter is nevertheless continuous. . . . The farther margin of the subliminal field being unknown, it can be treated as by Transcendental Idealism, as an Absolute mind with a part of which we coalesce, or by Christian theology, as a distinct deity acting on us. Something, not our immediate self, does act on our life ! " (ii pp. 149-150).

Again, writing in 1904, he says :

"I have frankly to confess that my *Varieties* carried 'theory' as far as I could then carry it, and that I can carry it no farther to-day. I can't see clearly over that edge. Yet I am sure that tracks have got to be made there. I think that the fixed point with me is the conviction that our 'rational' consciousness touches but a portion of the real universe, and that our life is fed by the 'mystical' region as well. I have no mystical experience of my own, but just enough of the germ of mysticism in me to recognise the region from which their voice comes when I hear it" (ii. p. 210).

To the end James felt that—

"The real crux is when you come to define objectively the ideals to which feeling reacts 'God is a Spirit'—*darauf geht es an*—on the last available definition of the term Spirit. It may be very abstract" (ii p. 218).

Before quitting the *Varieties*, it is of special

interest to note that at any rate the account of the 'sick soul' is based on direct personal experience. James admitted to a correspondent in 1904: "The document p. 160 is my own case—acute neurasthenic attack with phobia. I naturally disguised the *provenance*!"¹

The extracts we have given are of course but fragmentary samples, and in themselves give no hint of the varied interest of these intensely human *Letters*. The impressions of people, of novels, of places, are literary cameos which are none the less of the most finished kind for being so obviously spontaneous. One final quotation I cannot resist (II. p. 216).

"Make much of dear old Hoffding, who is a good pluralist and irrationalist. I took to him immensely, and so did everybody. Lecturing to my class, he told against the Absolutists an anecdote of an 'American' child who asked his mother if God made the world in six days. 'Yes.'—'The whole of it?'—'Yes.'—'Then it is all finished, all done?'—'Yes.'—'Then in what business now is God?' If he tells it in Oxford, you must reply: 'Sitting for his portrait to Royce, Bradley and Taylor.'"

¹ *La philosophie de William James*, by H. Flournoy, p. 149 n. The passage alluded to is reproduced in *Letters*, II p. 145 f.

VIII

IS DETERMINISM RATIONAL ?

[*The Hibbert Journal*, July 1922]

FOREWORD

My aim in this article is to show that whether Determinism is formulated as (a) "Whatever is, *must* be," or (b) "The real is rational," or (c) "All voluntary action is necessary," it is (1) indisputable, (2) meaningless, (3) indisputable *because* meaningless. This result, moreover, is a necessary consequence of applying Formal Logic to psychic fact. The will can then be treated as real or unreal, according to the varying needs of deterministic polemic. Thus empty verballity and implicit self-contradiction are made to appear as important truth.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF 'NECESSITY' AS A NECESSARY TRUTH

The *a priori* argument for Determinism has never been expressed with greater terseness, vigour, or clearness than in the following utterances of Mr F. H. Bradley

"We must insist that every act is a resultant from psychical conditions . . . This would be denied by what is vulgarly called Free Will. That attempts to make the self or will, in abstrac-

tion from concrete conditions, the responsible source of conduct. As however, taken in that abstraction, the self or will is nothing, 'Free Will' can merely mean chance. If it is not that, its advocates are at least incapable of saying what else it is. Considered either theoretically or practically, 'Free Will' is, in short, a mere lingering chimera. Certainly no writer, who respects himself, can be called on any longer to treat it seriously."¹

"Chance belongs to the world of existence and possibility to thought; but each contains at bottom the same defect, and each, against its will, when taken bare, becomes external necessity.

. The identity, in the end, of possibility with chance, and of chance with external or brute necessity, has instructive consequences. It would obviously give the proper ground for an estimate of that which vulgarly is termed Free Will. This doctrine may in philosophy be considered obsolete, though it will continue to flourish in popular ethics. As soon as its meaning is apprehended, it loses all plausibility. But the popular moralist will always exist by not knowing what he means."²

"There is no such thing as absolute chance, or as mere external necessity, or as unconditional possibility. The possible must, in part, be really, and that means internally, necessary."³

The points to note in this argument are :

(a) The dichotomy of necessity and chance.

¹ *Appearance and Reality*, 2nd edition, p. 435 and n

² *Op cit* p. 393 and n

³ *Op cit* p. 393

(b) The identification of freedom with possibility, in virtue of their common identity with chance.

(c) The assertion that there is no such thing as absolute chance. which seems to mean that the appearance of 'chance' is always due to our ignorance; so that what appears to be accidental is really necessary.

(d) The consequent disappearance of real possibility or freedom.

This argument seems incisive and conclusive enough. It would also be simple, but for the somewhat surprising introduction of something called 'external or brute necessity.' This has affinity not with the more reputable sort of 'necessity,' but with 'chance.' Indeed, its identity with 'chance' is emphasised. We are not, however, told that it leads to a Super-Reality, uniting 'necessity' and 'chance' in a higher synthesis. In fact, if 'necessity' and 'chance' are to remain distinct, and Mr Bradley's argument is not to be destroyed, 'external' necessity can have nothing but the name in common with the 'internal' necessity that pervades reality

Nevertheless, Mr. Bradley makes it clear that his fundamental objection to 'freedom' is not that it is unreal, but that it is essentially *unintelligible*. It is not even a necessary illusion of our finite intelligence. It is the very negation of reason, as such, and has a purely verbal mode of existence in the mouths of 'moralists' who do not know what they mean. It is this that makes Mr. Bradley such a good representative of Deter-

minism¹. for in the last resort all determinists fall back on this charge. Even an 'empiricist' like Bain can say in his chapter on 'Liberty and Necessity' in *Mental Science*

"The prediction of human conduct is not less sure than the prediction of physical phenomena.² . . . We do not convert mental sequences into pure material laws by calling them sequences and maintaining them (on evidence of fact) to be uniform in their working. Even, if we did make this blundering conversion, the remedy would not lie in the use of the word 'free.' We might with equal appropriateness describe the stone as free to fall, the moon as free to deviate under solar disturbance; for the stone might be restrained, and the moon somehow compelled to keep to an ellipse. Such phraseology would be obviously *unmeaning and absurd, but not a whit more so than in the application to the mental sequence of voluntary action*"³

¹ From Mr Bradley himself, however, we might reasonably have expected a rather more generous and detailed treatment of freedom as an *appearance*. In his view, all 'appearance' *as such* is self-contradictory and unintelligible. It necessarily follows that self-contradiction and unintelligibility do not in themselves disqualify a given entity for a place in that world of 'appearance' to which the plain man, in his ignorance, refers as 'the real world' *par excellence*. Why, indeed, should freedom be denied the 'degree of reality' accorded to time, the self, and causation—all of which are 'self-contradictory'? To be consistent, Mr Bradley should have shown that freedom is somehow *more* unintelligible than the other 'self-contradictions' of common sense. But perhaps that would have brought too clearly to light that the necessary counterpart of his theory of 'degrees of reality' is a theory of degrees of self-contradiction. Unfortunately, that there can be degrees of self-contradiction is just what the formal law of contradiction denies. The final source of all this confusion is, of course, Mr Bradley's failure to perceive that his reduction of *everything* to self-contradictory 'appearance' is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the formal law of contradiction.

² *Op cit* p 397 ³ *Op cit* pp 399-400 The italics are mine

II DETERMINISM AND 'LOGIC'

The fundamental contention, then, of Determinism is that freedom is theoretically inadmissible, because only the 'necessary' is intelligible. Now, this argument necessarily exhibits Determinism as not merely a psychological theory of the nature of Will, but also, and even more fundamentally, as a logical theory of the nature of Intelligence. It may be analysed further into its logical and psychological components.

A. Determinism, as a theory of Intelligence, assumes that the function of intelligence is to understand; and to understand is to explain. The particular function of 'proof' falls within this general definition. For to 'explain' a given fact is to show that, in the relevant circumstances, just this fact *must* arise, and no other. The principle that 'Whatever is, *must* be,' becomes, therefore, the necessary presupposition of intelligence, as such. Thus we will call the *Deterministic Principle*. It is the common inspiration of such nominally divergent schools as 'scientific' materialism and Kantian 'idealism'; and it forms the basis of the traditional 'Logic.'¹

B. Determinism, as a theory of Will, professes to explain voluntary action as the 'necessary' resultant of certain antecedent 'conditions,' which

¹ Cf e.g. Sigwart's *Logic* (translated by H. Dendy), vol. 1 p. 9. "Since actual Thought can and does miss its aim, we have need of a discipline which shall teach us to avoid error and dispute, and to conduct Thought in such a manner that the judgments may be *true*—that is, necessary and certain—that is, accompanied by a consciousness of their necessity, and therefore universally valid. Reference to this aim distinguishes the logical from the psychological treatment of thought."

are generally described as ' motives ' This theory we will call *Psychical Determinism*

The deterministic argument is the passage from the Deterministic Principle to Psychical Determinism It seems at first sight logically irrefutable. And it is logically invincible, in the sense that the claim of traditional Logic to deal with the *whole* of Reality stands *or falls* with the deterministic argument Determinism appears to be the very embodiment of pure reason, because the traditional Logic is *deliberately* deterministic. But, like every argument under the sun, the deterministic argument may be taken in one of two ways: either as establishing the truth of its conclusion, or as discrediting the assumptions from which it started. It may be taken *either* as a proof of Determinism, *or* as a proof that all is not well with the Deterministic Principle

Now, on examination, it will be found that the Deterministic Principle, together with the Logic which it inspires, and on which it in turn relies, has its Achilles' heel in the very fact that it severs will from intelligence In so doing, it *assumes* that the proper function of intelligence is contemplation rather than creation It is the Logic of the *fait accompli*: it regards ' Reality ' as something which we find, and do not in any sense make.

As the Deterministic Principle severs will from intelligence, so the deterministic argument, in applying that principle to the ' special case ' of volition, treats will primarily as an *object* of intelligence. This ' object ' is, indeed, *psychical*; but

qua 'object' it must conform to the 'necessary presuppositions' of intelligence. Moreover, not only does the deterministic argument take the intelligibility of 'necessity' for granted; but it also *assumes* that 'necessity' remains intelligible when voluntary activity is brought formally within its sphere. Determinists profess to find freedom unintelligible. For that very reason they must now be asked what they themselves mean by 'necessity.'

III. A PARENTHESIS ON FORMAL LOGIC

The deterministic argument, as we have seen, simply applies the Deterministic Principle to the special case of voluntary action. Judged by the canons of Formal Logic, its reasoning is unexceptionable. Unfortunately, it also provides an unsurpassed illustration of certain fundamental defects of Formal Logic. Of these, the most fatal is that Formal Logic is by its nature debarred from affording any protection against the fallacies of *ambiguity*. The effect of ambiguity is that a statement in one of its 'meanings' may be true; while in another, subtly different, 'meaning' it may be false. Because ambiguity corrupts meaning without affecting form—identity of form being indeed a condition of its existence—ambiguity cannot be regarded as a merely *formal* fallacy.

It was perhaps well for Formal Logic that it did not make this painful discovery for itself long ago; for the discovery is its death-blow. If ambiguity is *not* a formal defect, no perfection of syllogistic

or symbolic form can guard against it. The mere fact that an argument is word-perfect is quite consistent with its possessing *as* an argument no meaning at all. For, as Mr. Alfred Sidgwick (whom I have here freely used¹) has continually shown, when ambiguity comes in at the door, meaning flies out at the window. When an argument is convicted of 'effective ambiguity,' nothing can restore meaning to it except a radical reconsideration both of the 'facts' in the case and of the 'principles' concerned. And with every fresh application of a 'principle' the *possibility* of ambiguity arises, just because the application necessarily reacts on the 'meaning.'

Since every application of a principle to particular facts does not merely bring those facts within the scope of the principle, but also involves an *interpretation* of the principle as truly applicable thereto, it follows that it is only in its *applications* that we can discover what the principle 'really means.' A principle may be indisputable 'in the abstract'—*i.e.* when we have no other clue to its meaning than its verbal formulation,—and yet may become false and even self-contradictory when some unforeseen application reveals its latent 'meaning.' Nothing therefore is more irrational than such blind faith in an abstract principle as will impel us to 'follow the argument whithersoever it may lead,' without paying any heed to where we are going. Such faith is not faith in reason, but faith in words and formulas.

¹ See especially his *Distinction and Criticism of Beliefs*, and *The Use of Words in Reasoning*. Cf. also Dr. F. C. S. Schiller's *Formal Logic*.

IV. THE INITIAL DILEMMA OF DETERMINISM

So long as the 'special case' of voluntary activity is kept in the background, 'necessity' appears as merely the correlative of 'chance'; it seems as if everything must be referred to one or the other of these categories. But the assertion that "Voluntary action, like everything else, is *necessary*," immediately necessitates a revision of this formal definition of 'necessity'. Determinism drags volition into its 'system' as lightly and triumphantly as the Trojans dragged the wooden horse within their fortress walls. And it suspects as little as the Trojans what a fatal capture it is effecting.

For, voluntary action at the very least *appears* to provide a *tertium quid* to the simple dichotomy of 'necessity' and 'chance'. *Prima facie* it is neither necessary nor accidental. It is intentional and purposive. *Qua* intentional, it is the very opposite of blind 'necessity'; *qua* purposive, it is the very opposite of blind 'chance'. This purposive character it does, indeed, share (in a sense) with vital 'phenomena' as a whole. But as *conscious pursuit of real ends* voluntary activity seems to be peculiar. For common sense, there is not merely a difference; there is all the difference in the world between suffering something because we cannot help it, and doing something because we choose to; just as there is all the difference in the world between what happens 'by accident' and what is done on purpose. In so far, indeed, as anything is *absolutely* beyond our

control, it makes no difference *practically* whether we call it 'necessity' or 'chance' or 'fate'

At the very outset, then, Determinism is confronted with this dilemma 'Necessity,' to be universal, must *include* purposive (*i.e.* voluntary) action, but purposive activity, on the face of it, *excludes* 'necessity' This situation has received the singularly inappropriate name of the 'Problem of Free Will' A less question-begging description of it would be the 'Paradox of Universal Necessity'

At first, no doubt, an easy solution seems practicable. Let it be denied that purpose really exists at all This would dispose of the discrepant fact of volition, and would once more leave 'necessity' formally in possession of the whole field of 'reality' But, unfortunately, Psychical Determinism professes to deny, not the reality of will, but only its 'freedom' The 'necessity' of volition is, in fact, deduced directly from its 'objective reality' The deterministic argument, therefore, appears most singularly to combine the characteristics of a *petitio* and a self-contradiction: at best its 'meaning' is, to begin with, wholly problematic. Hardly an auspicious start for a theory which professes to be the embodiment of perfect rationality.

It is not, be it observed, the abstract notion of 'necessity' which is *prima facie* self-contradictory, but only the notion of an *universal* 'necessity' which *excludes* 'chance,' but *includes* purposive or voluntary activity. We may now definitely raise the question whether the *meaning*

of 'necessity' does not depend on its *limitation*. In particular, we have to inquire whether the *scientific* use of 'necessity' supports the deterministic theory. For if deterministic 'necessity' is *not* to be identified with scientific 'necessity,' we may at any rate say of it in this connection what Mr. Bradley said of freedom in connection with chance: "If it is not that, its advocates are at least incapable of saying what else it is."¹

V. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN 'NECESSITY' AND PURPOSE

We have spoken of 'necessity' as 'blind,' to point the contrast with purposive, or voluntary, activity, which is characterised by *foresight*. The 'laws' of mechanics may fairly be taken as the typical example of scientific or natural 'necessity'. And this means that the notion of natural 'necessity' is in a special way associated with the behaviour of inanimate objects. Conversely, the distinctive mark of the inanimate, as such, is its complete indifference, not only to human welfare, but also to any end whatsoever. The inanimate knows nothing of values, because it presumably knows nothing at all. It is, in fact, exclusively, and unambiguously, an *object* of intelligence. Not only may we grant that the behaviour of objects *in this sense*—*i.e.* objects which do not themselves display intelligence—is characterised by 'necessity,' but we may assert that *in this sense* 'objectivity' and 'necessity' are, in principle, one and the same

¹ *Vide supra*, p. 151

That the notion of natural 'necessity' receives its primary *verification* in the study of inanimate objects is generally recognised¹ That it is expressly designed to rule out 'final causes' should, for that very reason, be sufficiently obvious.

This notion of scientific or natural 'necessity' takes tangible shape and receives experimental verification in the manufacture of machines. But the 'purely scientific' point of view concentrates on the internal 'necessity' of the machine, and ignores, or abstracts from, the mind of the inventor. It seeks to know only *how* things work, not *why* they were made. It emphasises the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice,' and disclaims all 'utilitarian' intent. In a word, the scientific outlook is (in intention and of set purpose) impersonal, non-ethical, and non-teleological, and the 'necessity' which expresses it necessarily shares these characteristics. In the words of Mr. Bertrand Russell:

"The kernel of the scientific outlook is a thing so simple, so obvious, so seemingly trivial, that the mention of it may almost excite derision. The kernel of the scientific outlook is the *refusal* to regard our own desires, tastes, and interests as affording a key to the understanding of the world"²

¹ Cf the opening sentences of Clerk Maxwell's *Matter and Motion* "Physical science is that department of knowledge which relates to the order of nature, or, in other words, to the regular succession of events The name of physical science, however, is often applied in a more or less restricted manner to those branches of science in which the phenomena considered are of the simplest and most abstract kind, excluding the consideration of the more complex phenomena, such as those observed in living beings" This preliminary exclusion of 'living beings' involves a preliminary abstention from the study of anything that is *in any sense* purposive—*except* actual machines.

² *Mysticism and Logic*, p 42 (italics mine)

Volition, on the other hand, is, strictly speaking, the sole object of ethical judgment; it is the essence of personality; and it is literally nothing if not teleological or purposive.

Wherever, therefore, the notion of natural 'necessity' *can* be significantly applied, it *ipso facto* displaces the teleological, voluntaristic, or animistic explanation of 'phenomena,' and, within its universe of discourse, rules out will as a *vera causa*. In short, there is only one kind of natural 'necessity'; and that is *physical* 'necessity.' On these terms, and only on these terms, the idea of 'necessity' may be applied to the 'phenomena' of life. That is to say, it can be so applied, just so far as will is treated as negligible or ineffective. That, for instance, is the precise significance of Darwinism as a 'naturalistic' or scientific explanation of the apparent purposiveness displayed in organic 'adaptations.' Adaptive structures, on this theory, are brought about without the will or consent of the organism concerned—and without any *intention*, anywhere, to bring about that result. At every stage in the evolution of any organ, the structure is the 'necessary' resultant of the precedent 'conditions.' The explanation is held to be scientific, just because it is *not* teleological. *Per contra*, it is only where we are compelled to fall back on a teleological explanation, that we find it necessary to postulate the intervention of will. Hence, to include the volitional within the sphere of the 'necessary' necessarily destroys the meaning both of volition and of 'necessity.' To assert that 'voluntary' acts are

'necessary,' is to assert that they are not *really* voluntary. •

It follows, also, that the scientific conception of 'necessity,' when extended to voluntary action, produces not Psychological Determinism, but '*Behaviourism*.' We must now say, not that psychological 'events' are 'necessary,' but that 'consciousness does not exist.' So long as our attitude to 'objective phenomena' is that of the 'disinterested' *spectator*, we are at perfect liberty to make the 'methodological assumption' that purely physical 'laws' are completely adequate to the 'explanation' of those 'phenomena.' But if that assumption is capable of complete *verification*, then Occam's razor cuts out mind, as an 'objective reality,' altogether.

VI. THE IDENTITY OF WILL AND INTELLIGENCE

The clear differentiation of the inanimate from the animate is what distinguishes the outlook of civilised man from that of the savage. In what *we* regard as the 'blind forces of nature,' the savage sees the working of a mind, or minds, akin to his own. 'Natural necessity' has no meaning for him, just because he 'explains' everything by will. Behaviourism, it will be observed, is a simple inversion of this primitive 'superstition.' For the behaviourist, consciousness does not exist, just because he 'explains' everything as 'necessary.'

Because the savage attributes to the things of nature powers similar, but superior, to his own, he

seeks to *propitiate* nature rather than to subdue it. His 'magical' practices are the natural expression of his theoretic outlook. Unfortunately, it is a doubtful compliment to say of anything that it 'works like magic'; for magic, so far as we can see, does not work.

Nevertheless, as a speculative venture, primitive Animism has points. It starts from the conscious subject's immediate experience of passion and activity. It proceeds, that is, from the known to the unknown. Primitive Animism, moreover, is the earliest attempt to 'explain the world by a single principle'—which many still regard as a legitimate philosophic ambition. Its weak point, as already indicated, lies, like that of most philosophies, in its practical futility. But it does not achieve the supreme futility of priding itself on this.

Having once succeeded in distinguishing between the animate and the inanimate, men of the 'higher culture' naturally regard it as a waste of time to appeal to the better feelings of inanimate objects. In the act of making this distinction, we have found a better way. We have made the wonderful discovery that in nature's neutrality lies our great opportunity. For, in so far as things have no will of their own, they cannot set themselves to thwart *ours*. The more we know of nature's ways, the more nature becomes subservient to *our own* intelligence. For with foresight there enters into the world-process the possibility of guidance, or *control*.

Control is a 'function' (in the mathematical

sense) of intelligence. So much is obvious. But intelligence, *as exercising control*, is indistinguishable from volition. The deterministic treatment of will as merely an *object* of intelligence is, therefore, a mere question-begging device.

The essential identity of will and intelligence is, indeed, patent even from the point of view of the spectator. As applied to behaviour, the words 'voluntary' and 'intelligent' are strictly synonymous. As James says:

"The pursuance of future ends, and the choice of means for their attainment, are the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a phenomenon."¹

And again:

"Will and Belief, in short, meaning a certain relation between objects and the Self, are two names for one and the same *psychological* phenomenon. All the questions which arise concerning one are questions which arise concerning the other."²

VII. WILL AS CAUSE

That intelligence, in the form of will, is itself a factor in the shaping of the reality which it 'knows,' is obvious to the plain man. Nor has any logician 'ever dreamt of denying it'—in so many words. But it is, for all that, a fact which the traditional 'Logic' has chosen systematically to ignore. And the Deterministic Principle, which is the basis of that 'Logic,' certainly *means*—so far as it means anything—to convert that abstrac-

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, vol 1 p 8 ² *Op cit* vol 11 p 321

tion into a systematic denial of the fact. Let us, *per contra*, enumerate a few of the consequences that flow from an unequivocal and straightforward acceptance of an efficacious intelligence or will.

(a) Since control is a 'function' of intelligence, and since from the strictly scientific, or biological, point of view, there is no other *object* in thinking, it seems to follow that controllability, rather than the abstraction called 'pure necessity,' is the necessary presupposition of intelligence. That is to say, the admission of mind as a vital 'phenomenon' means that the science of *Life* has already begun to transcend the category of 'necessity.'

(b) The fact that control is a 'function' of intelligence discredits, at a single stroke, the abstract distinction between the 'subjective' and the 'objective'—a distinction which is continually used to suggest the inferiority, and often to suggest the 'unreality,' of the 'subjective.' It discredits that distinction, because it forces us to recognise that, through the medium of volition, the most 'subjective' thing about us, namely, our *preferences*, may decide the course of events in nature.

(c) It impugns the theoretic value of the distinction between 'fact' and 'value,' because now we are compelled to recognise that our valuations may determine the occurrence of the facts.

(d) It discredits the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice,' seeing that intelligence can now no longer be treated as merely contemplative

(e) It shows that the *utility* of knowledge is nothing that intelligence need be ashamed of, or disown as foreign to its essential nature. For such utility is a corollary of the fact that intelligence is, to some extent, *creative*.

All these abstract antitheses—between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective,’ between ‘fact’ and ‘value,’ between ‘theory’ and ‘practice,’ between ‘truth’ and ‘utility’—are, obviously, systematically inter-related. That in each case the distinction is *absolute* appears to be the necessary presupposition of the traditional, or deterministic ‘Logic.’ But precisely the opposite assumption appears to be the necessary presupposition of any *intelligence* that is itself a constituent of reality. The traditional ‘Logic,’ in short, is an attempt to conceive the world as a ‘system’ which is *uninfluenced* by the presence within it of intelligent beings. Just so far as that abstraction is applicable and useful, ‘Logic’ may possess its own peculiar kind of truth. When the abstraction is taken as the whole truth, it manifestly becomes self-contradictory and meaningless.

VIII. DETERMINISTIC ‘LOGIC’ VERSUS DETERMINISTIC ‘PSYCHOLOGY’

The antitheses briefly reviewed in the last section are all ancillary to the basic intellectualist antithesis between the so-called ‘logical’ and ‘psychological’ points of view. Orthodox ‘Logic’ avowedly ‘has nothing to do with psychology.’ Conversely, orthodox ‘psychology’ disclaims all interest in the truth or falsity of the ‘ideas’ or

'states of consciousness' which it professes to study.¹

This is perhaps the master-stroke of intellectualist, or deterministic, theory. For, from neither of these two 'points of view' does *purpose* form a feature of the landscape. The 'logical' point of view refuses to consider the efficacy or *utility* of intelligence, in virtue of which intelligence is purposive or *creative*. The 'psychological' point of view correspondingly shuts out the significance, and even the reality, of *foresight*; inasmuch as 'psychology' has no official cognisance of the distinction between truth and error. Thus the orthodox severance of 'Logic' from 'psychology' automatically makes of the world a mere 'object' of contemplation; and at the same time, while pretending to preserve the 'reality' of mind, makes of mind the meaningless reduplication (or misrepresentation, as the case may be) of a soulless mechanism.

¹ Cf. e.g. Sigwart, *Logic*, 1 p. 9 (in continuation of the passage quoted on p. 154, n.) "The psychological treatment of Thought is concerned with the knowledge of Thought as it actually is, hence it seeks the laws according to which, under certain conditions, a certain thought appears in just one way and no other. Its task is to explain all actual Thought according to the general laws of psychical activity, and as arising from the particular conditions of the individual instance, thus dealing with all Thought alike, whether erroneous and disputable, or true and generally accepted. The antithesis of true and false is no more a psychological one than is the antithesis of good and bad in human action." (On the very same page, however, Sigwart recognises—with startling inconsequence—that logical 'necessity' implies *psychological freedom*. "Instruction in an art which claims to ensure success for the activity to which it gives rules *presupposes that this activity is completely free and voluntary*. If there is to be an Art ensuring the production of necessary and universally valid Thought, by means of which we may know the Truth, we must assume that all the conditions lie within our grasp, and, that at any given time we are *completely free to control our Thought* in accordance with its rules." *Vide op. cit.* pp. 9-10. (The italics are mine.)

In other words., through the gap between 'Logic' and 'psychology,' freedom and purpose are silently thrust out of sight, out of mind, and out of existence. And this dark deed is done in the name of the 'disinterested' love of Truth. Whosoever attempts, in the name of common sense, to restore to purpose, in theory, the predominant position it occupies in Life, is coldly informed that as a philosopher he has not learnt the rudiments of his business. He is 'confusing Logic with psychology,' and allowing 'merely practical' considerations to distort his 'theoretic' vision of the whole.

Without doubt, this is a shrewdly conceived scheme, and it has *de facto* been remarkably successful in its primary purpose of *making* freedom unintelligible. Its bold and masterly use of the *periphrasis* seems to ensure its internal coherence; even as its practical utility attests its theoretic 'purity.' Nevertheless, taken strictly on its own merits, it is profoundly *incoherent*. For consider :

The traditional or deterministic 'Logic' sees in our emotional and volitional nature nothing but a 'subjective' hindrance to the 'disinterested' pursuit of 'objective' truth. In intelligence it sees, 'in Plato's magnificent phrase,' nothing but the Spectator of All Time and All Existence.

On the other hand, for deterministic *psychology* our emotional and volitional nature is certainly quite *objective*. Our emotions are given causal efficacy under the name of 'motives.' Volition

is treated as a perfectly natural phenomenon. Intelligence itself, under the name of 'cognition' (though purged of truth and meaning), forms part of the eternal film which unrolls itself to the gaze of the unmoved Spectator.

The 'Logic' and the 'psychology' of Determinism are thus hopelessly at cross purposes. Everything which from the 'point of view' of the first is *purely* 'subjective' is necessarily treated by the second as *purely* 'objective.' And yet the former point of view must 'somehow' include the latter, or perish in the attempt¹

It follows that while the deterministic scheme as a whole is an elaborate *petitio*, at the very heart of its 'Logic' there is a fatal contradiction. For the 'logical' point of view is *ex hypothesi* that of an *all-inclusive system* of 'truth': and yet its distinctive character resides in its *systematic* exclusion of the 'psychological' point of view.

In its 'Idealistic' form, the scheme professes to *identify* Thought and Reality, Meaning and Existence. Yet the distinction it makes between 'Logic' and 'psychology' is based on an *absolute distinction* between the 'meaning' and 'existence' of Thought itself. To Intellectualism, in all its forms, will must always remain an insoluble problem; for will is precisely *the point at which intelligence becomes a real factor in the shaping of reality*. All that Intellectualism *can* do with such

¹ I have not here thought it necessary to draw attention to a point which the critics of 'Idealism' seem unanswerably to have established—namely, that the 'idealistic' theory of 'truth' makes *error* unintelligible. So that, after all, its 'Logic' is as incompetent as its 'psychology' to *distinguish* between the true and the false

an inconvenient entity is to explain it away altogether." but in doing so it destroys the *connection* between 'intelligence' and 'reality.'

IX. 'INDISPUTABILITY' VERSUS TRUTH

We can now see wherein lies the real difficulty of dealing with Determinism. The exigencies of debate compel us, in the first instance, to treat it as a genuine system of 'belief'—as something the content of which can be adequately expressed in the form of a judgment, or system of judgments. But the more closely we consider the 'system,' the less are we able to find any consistent meaning. Determinism now appears to be, rather, a subtle 'disposition,' or—in Freudian terms—a 'complex'; which is, indeed, bent on expressing itself in rational terms, but remains essentially irrational.

Deterministic psychology, in particular, professes to deny, not the reality of will, but only its 'freedom.' The essential ambiguity of this position should now be evident. And the ambiguity is of a kind that can only be described as purposive and systematic, or, in one word, as 'malicious.' It seems to be expressly designed to treat purpose as illusory, without in so many words denying its 'objective reality.'¹ This we may now take as the inmost, or *effective* 'meaning'

¹ In that crudest form of deterministic theory, which is called 'Epiphenomenalism,' the reality of 'will' as an *effect* is formally admitted, while its reality as a *cause* is overtly denied. All other forms of Determinism try, in one way or another, to avoid betraying so clearly the secret springs of the 'theory.' For what Bergson says of time is even more obviously true of will "If it *does* nothing, it is nothing"

of Determinism. In a purely controversial setting, we are bound to treat it as a mere 'confusion of thought' But once we have established its logical character, the ingenuity of the scheme, in its details, must extort our reluctant admiration.

We are now in a position to review the deterministic argument, as a whole, from this more liberal standpoint. And, first of all, we must take account of the fact that Determinism, as now defined, has captured and corrupted practically the whole vocabulary of 'Logic.' Thus, to 'explain' *means*—in 'Logic'—to 'explain as necessary', 'system' *means*—in 'Logic'—a system of 'necessity'; and 'necessity' *means*—in 'Logic'—'*absolute* necessity.'

This manœuvre—which is equivalent to the capture of the 'machine' in party politics—is strengthened by the fact that the traditional 'Logic' apparently regards indisputability as the hall-mark of truth. And this puts a premium on purely verbal arguments; which, in the nature of the case, are verbally indisputable. Thus the capture of the vocabulary of 'Logic' enables determinists to represent what is really a self-contradiction as being a 'necessary truth.'

It is at least certain that the traditional 'Logic' attaches no special importance to the *distinction* between indisputability and truth; as is shown, *e g.* by the importance it *does* attach to the 'laws of thought.' In particular, the 'first law of thought'—that 'Whatever is, is'—seems definitely to identify *verbal* indisputability with truth. It condones, and in fact glorifies, pure

tautology, instead of following common sense in condemning it as meaningless.¹

A truism is, in a sense, indisputable. But so also, in essentially the same sense and for the same reason, is a formal, or obvious, self-contradiction. If a truism 'means' what it says, this is only because it really says nothing at all. *Therefore* it is absurd and meaningless to *deny* it. In the same way, solemnly to *deny* an admittedly (or formally) self-contradictory statement is to credit it with some real meaning in virtue of which it *can* be denied. And *that* is really self-contradictory.

But, in practice, a truism is seldom so innocuous or so idiotic as it pretends to be. Just because an out-and-out truism, like the 'first law of thought' itself, if it means anything at all, must mean something different from what it says, it may be made to mean almost anything under the sun. And whichever of its 'meanings' we can prove to be untenable or misleading, its adherents can always pretend that, for that very reason, it must 'really mean' something else. This is notoriously the case with the 'first law of thought.' Even those who profess to regard it as the foundation of all reasoning seem to admit that though its '*truth*' is indisputable, its *meaning* is not. This is necessarily implied in the mere fact that they profess to *explain* the 'meaning.'

We come, then, to this fundamental point.

¹ The position which in the text I have tried to defend in a manner free from any suspicion of irony, has been more pithily expressed by that legendary Sage of Cadiz, who said "Everything is what it is. Hence, if asked, 'What's a spade?' just reply, 'It's a spade' then your friend will know *what* a spade is"

Verbal indisputability is no guarantee against real ambiguity, but rather the reverse. And conversely, ambiguity can most effectively cast the cloak of indisputability over a dubious assertion. Ambiguity, in fact, precisely because it is fatal to real meaning, is *controversially* the greatest asset that a radically unsound position can possess. It is not merely that it *seems* to make the assertion indisputable. It actually does so; in that, until we know what 'meaning' the assertor intends to stand by, there is really nothing for us to *deny*. Ensnared in ambiguity, the greatest absurdity may enjoy an honorific career as a 'necessary truth.' Taken separately, the several 'meanings' may be indefensible and even ridiculous: taken collectively and in the mass, they will be literally unanswerable.

X. THE AMBIGUITY OF DETERMINISM

Without pretending to exhaust all the possibilities of the deterministic equivocation, we may yet indicate its main features in the hope not so much of convincing our opponents as of showing where they really stand.

If we accept the deterministic identification of the 'intelligible' with the 'necessary' at its own valuation, as *indisputable*, then its real ambiguity is made evident by the fact that, *as applied to will*, it is self-contradictory.

The deterministic assertion that 'Voluntary action like everything else, is necessary' is *prima facie* self-contradictory, for the reason that 'necessity' in the scientific sense *excludes* volition. It

may, however, avoid *direct* self-contradiction, under one or the other of the following interpretations. (a) The assertion may mean that there is no 'objective' or recognisable difference between 'voluntary' and reflex action. Or it may mean (b) that action which *really is* voluntary, *i.e.* intentional and purposive, must, in the interests of 'pure theory,' be treated as non-teleological. That is to say, in order to 'understand' purpose, we must treat it *as if* it were an illusion.

Under interpretation (a), the statement that 'voluntary action is necessary' becomes the assertion that the actions which we call 'voluntary' are *in reality* 'necessary.' And this means that for the scientific consciousness, 'consciousness does not exist.' This appears to be the position of Behaviourism. While apparently admitting the ideal distinction between will and 'necessity,' it makes 'necessity' *de facto* universal. Though, as just stated, it is verbally self-contradictory, we may perhaps grant that it is not necessarily meaningless. But Determinism, thus interpreted, drops all pretence to 'necessary truth,' and also the pretence of believing in the reality of will. This interpretation, therefore, affords no support to *Psychical* Determinism.

Nevertheless the possibility of so interpreting the deterministic formula ('Voluntary action is necessary') that it shall not necessarily be meaningless, has, quite illegitimately, inured to the benefit of *Psychical* Determinism—as will be shown in the next section. Conversely, the supposed

indisputability of the *abstract* Deterministic Principle ('Whatever is, *must be*') has, quite illegitimately, inured to the benefit of Behaviourism. Behaviourism appears to its supporters as the *logical development* of an indisputable logical principle. Thus it is not recognised as the *only* means of rescuing the deterministic position from patent absurdity.

Under interpretation (b) Determinism relies on the *a priori* identification of the 'intelligible' with the 'necessary.' This seems, in fact, to be the nearest and most plausible approach to a real meaning that *Psychical* Determinism can make.

So interpreted, however, *Psychical* Determinism appears to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Deterministic Principle—the principle that only the 'necessary' is intelligible. If its adherents refuse to see it in this light, it still remains a *petitio principii*. For a *petitio* consists in nothing else than this. that one of the parties to a dispute insists on regarding as a demonstrable 'truth' a conclusion which *in the eyes of his opponents* discredits the principle it is derived from. And even so, the 'meaning' we have now arrived at is highly dubious.

For it is not enough to identify the 'intelligible' with the 'necessary': we must also identify the 'real' with both of these, so as to form the equation—'the "real" = the "rational"'. Unless we do this, Determinism as a *theory of Reality* collapses forthwith. It is, in fact, precisely on its identification of the 'real' with the 'rational' *in this sense*, that Determinism, like Idealism (from

which in this respect it is indistinguishable) founds its claim to perfect 'rationality.' To say, therefore, that purpose, *as it really is*, is unintelligible, directly destroys the ultimate basis of Determinism. Thus, if Psychological Determinism *maintains* its pretence of treating will as real, it contradicts itself. If it *drops* that pretence, it relapses into Behaviourism. This, no doubt, is why it prefers to remain ambiguous.

XI. THE DETERMINISTIC 'ARGUMENT FROM ANALOGY'

If the deterministic argument be thrown into the form of an argument from analogy—as, for the sake of appearance, is usually done by 'empiricist' writers—we obtain exactly the same result as before.

Physical science naturally, and rightly, treats *purely* physical, *i.e.* non-purposive, events as 'necessary'. That is, it treats them as non-teleological. As mind implies purpose, so purpose, in the full sense of the word, implies mind. Hence the physicist—who is not, after all, bound to take the whole realm of reality for his province¹—is fully justified in leaving the consideration of purpose to the psychologist. But if he treats of purposive events at all, he *is* bound, *qua* physicist, to treat them, *so far as possible*, as if they were non-purposive.

Enter now the deterministic psychologist. He is overcome with admiration of the methods and presuppositions which, he emphatically proclaims,

¹ See *supra*, p. 161, footnote 1

"have proved so universally applicable and fruitful in physical science" He takes no account whatsoever of the fact that no physicist has yet, *e.g.*, succeeded in predicting the exact course of events throughout the next year, or minute, within his own parish, to say nothing of the Universe; or explained in detail, *on purely physical principles*, the sequence of events in any historical movement, great or small. The deterministic psychologist, that is to say, in effect treats the behaviourist postulate as if it were already and indisputably verified as a method for 'explaining' the concrete facts of human behaviour.

Accordingly, he announces his intention of imitating the physicist. Since the physicist treats all matters within his province as 'necessary,' he the psychologist, will do likewise. He assumes, therefore, that will—which is purpose—must, like everything *else*, be 'necessary.' Which means that its special character must be ignored: it, too, must be treated as if it were *not* purposive. He does not perceive that he has begun with a *petitio*, and ended with a self-contradiction. On the contrary, he appears, in general, to be full of intellectual contempt for the puzzle-headed people who fail to acclaim his position as purely rational and self-evident. Is he not, after all, merely claiming that the 'real' is 'rational,' and that the 'rational' is 'real'?

When the deterministic psychologist *does* see, more or less clearly, what is wrong with his position, he does not throw overboard the Deter-

ministic Principle. Rather than do that, he jettisons *mind*, and himself appears as that intellectual sans-culottist, the behaviourist. He may continue to *call* himself a psychologist; but he has (in theory) for ever done with *Psyche*.

If, *per contra*, the chain of physical 'necessity,' as known to us, is *not* complete; if the world of the physicist is *not* demonstrably a self-sufficing, closed 'system'; then physical 'necessity,' as such, is *not* demonstrably absolute. In that case, the bottom falls out of the deterministic argument from the absolute 'necessity' of the physical world to the absolute 'necessity' of the world of mind—quite apart from the intrinsically self-contradictory nature of the conclusion. There remains, on the contrary, room for another principle than that of 'necessity,' and for an alternative method of explanation. Mind conceived as the vehicle of purpose is such a principle; and teleology is its method. Conceived in any other way, mind fails to fulfil the purpose of the conception.

XII. CONCLUSION

The general result, then, that we arrive at is this. In order to uphold the principle of absolute and universal 'necessity'—in the scientific sense of 'necessity'—it is necessary to suppress the reality of purpose. But this abstract relation between 'universal necessity' and purpose does not in any way compel us to admit either that 'necessity' is universal, or that purpose is 'unreal.' What the necessity of suppressing pur-

pose for the purpose of upholding 'universal necessity' *does* prove is this ' (1) that 'universal necessity' is *not* a 'necessary presupposition' of intelligence; (2) that *Psychical* Determinism is essentially self-contradictory.

This result does not establish Voluntarism as a 'theoretically necessary' system. in itself it leaves us free to choose between Voluntarism and Behaviourism. But it obviously calls for further critical examination of the notion of 'theoretical necessity.'

For the moment we must be content with this reflection. that in a psychological sense Determinism means too much, and in a logical sense too little, in that its various 'meanings' psychologically support, but logically cancel, each other. Nevertheless, its subtle attempt to *exclude* Will from Reality is logically equivalent to the admission that in a world which *includes* mind, 'necessity' is not the final word.

By the same author

THE WILL TO BE FREE

Professor William McDougall in *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution* "In this essay Knox shows that the attempt to establish universal determinism is an assertion of free will, and the acceptance of universal necessity an act of free choice Knox's brilliant demonstration of the ineffective character of the argument for Determinism, his shattering attack upon the citadel of intellectualism, his withering exposure of the puerilities of conventional logic, embolden me to say a word on this topic In view of the wide prevalence of the prejudice in favour of determinism, I had thought it wise to avoid raising this question I will now venture to say that the reality of teleological causation, or purposive activity, does imply indeterminism of the will "

The Scotsman "The bulk of Captain Knox's vigorously argued volume is devoted to exposing the disputability of the 'indisputable logic' by which Voluntarists were to be cowed into intellectual submission "

By the same author

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